

CHANDLERTHINKS

Elk River, Minnesota Community Brand

BRAND COMPASS & BRAND NAVIGATOR

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Introduction

The Power of the Brand

A community's reputation will be defined by its government, its businesses, its organizations and its residents – *or*, it will be defined by others. When community leadership makes the choice to define itself, it takes a step toward managing and sustaining its reputation. When a community abrogates their responsibility, a perception vacuum is created. This vacuum will be filled with a variety of discordant, often conflicting messages and always by competitors seeking points of differentiation. The choice is clear for a community seeking to compete effectively in a state, regional, national and global economic environment.

Communities are living, breathing environments composed of a variety of constituencies, assets, products and customer experiences. When viewed as an aggregate these components clarify the true identity of the community and reveal its strongest competitive positioning. A community's strength and authenticity is derived from its people and values, its history, culture, geography, commerce, business, education, recreation, natural assets, man-made assets and quality of life. Through the prism of redundant qualitative and quantitative research, the community's values, assets and priorities are revealed and the process to identifying the community's authentic brand is a clearly marked pathway.

An authentic brand is not induced or manufactured. An authentic brand must derive from an organic reflection of the community. This is its true power – its ability to be

embraced, understood, appreciated and employed with pride and enthusiasm. While the process of cultivating positive perceptions and changing negative perceptions can take time to achieve, a well-orchestrated, hard-working organic brand can help a community preserve their identity in the face of an incident and rally a community to a common purpose.

After all, the Elk River brand is all about what makes Elk River unique, special and memorable. It is all about Elk River values, quality of life and pride. It is all about Elk River, Minnesota.



Table of Contents	
BRAND COMPASS	6 - 27
Brand Compass Introduction	6
Community Footprint Audit & Digital Audit	7-8
On-Site Findings	9-10
Attitude Awareness and Perception Study	11-12
ESRI Tapestry	13-15
Evaluation – Brand Truths	16
Brand Profile	17
Brand Marketing Platform & Brand Promise Statement	18
The Elk River Brand Promise Statement	19
The Elk River Brand Expression & Story Boards	20-23
Community Profile	24-30
BRAND NAVIGATOR	31- 165
I. Building the Brand Organization	
1. Take Ownership	31-35
2. Lay a Strong Foundation.	36-40
3. Build the Brand Navigation Messaging Package	41-43
4. The Brand Navigators as Chief Brand Marketers	44-46
5. Take the Lead on High Impact Brand Projects	47-57
6. Identify Brand Funding & Resources	58-59
7. Sustain the Brand Culture & Momentum	60
II. Prepare to Tell the Elk River Story	
1. Get Elk River Insiders Aboard First	61-65
2. Conduct a Communications Audit	66
3. Elk River Branded Merchandise Spreads the Word	67-68
4. Community Brand Launch	69-70
5. Make the Brand Real for Elk River Residents	71
III. The Brand as Marketing Platform	
1. The Marketing Mix	72-73
2. Put Communication Touchpoints to Work	74-76
3. The Website as #1 Marketing Tool	77-81
4. Employ Brand Messaging to Build Reputation	82-83
5. Deploy Social Media	84-89
6. Energize Public Relations	90-92

IV. The Brand as Community-Building Platform	
1. Leverage Community Strength	93-94
2. Leverage Community Organizations	95-99
3. Leverage Existing Community Events	100-103
V. The Brand as a City Platform	
1. Align Branding Goals with City's Vision and Goals	104-105
2. Harness the Power of Communication	106-107
3. Everybody Sells Elk River!	108-109
4. Energize <i>Currents</i> .	110-112
5. Assemble a Powerful Database	113-114
6. Practice Customer Relationship Management	115
7. Imbed the Brand	116-117
8. Brand the City Publications	118-119
9. Pump Up the City Website	120-123
10. Speak with One Social Media Voice	124-125
VI. The Brand as EDA Platform	
1. Align the Brand with the EDA Goals	126-128
2. Cultivate Champions for Elk River and the Brand	129
3. Launch a Powerful EDA Website Brand for Elk River	130-135
4. Build Up Inventory & Project Pages	136-137
5. Target Economic Development Messaging	138-139
6. Consolidate and Strengthen your "Natural Resources"	140
7. Get Closer to the Realtors	141-143
8. Build Targeted Industry and Trade Media Databases	144
9. Launch an Online Presence	145-147
10. Powering Up Economic Development	148-149
VII. The Brand as a Catalyst for Public/Private Partnerships	
1. Re-energize Downtown Facades	150-151
2. Power Up Start-Ups	152-153
3. Re-Purpose Vacant Downtown Storefronts	154
4. The River <i>IS</i> the Elk River Brand	155
5. Gateway Clean-Up - One Stretch at a Time	156
6. Multiply the "Friends" Model to Enhance Other Parks	157
7. Leverage Elk River Education and Industry Clusters	158
VIII. Resources	
1. Implementation Guideline	160-161
2. Brand Navigator Job Description	162-163
3. Social Media Plan Outline	164
4. Estimated Brand Budget	165

BRAND COMPASS

The power of a brand to reflect a community's core values and its true and authentic identity is premised on a combination of solid research, creative interpretation and a customized plan to launch, build and sustain the brand as a community voice.

The Brand Compass reflects the diligent and redundant research undertaken to identify the Elk River community brand. Employing a variety of research methodologies intended to reveal, capture and measure the character and perceptions of those living and working in the community as well as those outside the community, the Brand Compass becomes the foundation upon which an authentic community brand is built.

A Summary of the Brand Compass process including extracts from the Elk River Brand Research and a Community Profile are included here as a prelude to the Elk River Brand Platform, Brand Promise, Brand Statement and a recommended Brand Expression and sample creative interpretation.

This brand identity, platform and statement along with the recommended Brand Expression and recommended creative interpretations fuel the development of the Brand Navigator – the Elk River Brand Implementation Plan. The Brand Navigator continues the creative interpretation and offers strategies and tactics to effectively launch, build and sustain the Elk River brand as a powerful platform to build identity and reputation.

Community Footprint Audit

This evaluation is intended to provide the brand developers and brand client with a marketing perspective of their community. The findings and observations are part of the exploration and discovery process.

1. It is easy to see how expectations can be created to passers-by that Elk River is about Elks. If you do a scan of community signs and images, most things (welcome signs, water towers, school mascots-logos, fire trucks, pole banners, liquor stores) display an elk. Besides it is part of the Elk River name. So the big question is, "where are the elk"?
2. The river of course is a natural aesthetic to the community that sends a strong message.
3. Community marketing lightly references the outdoor connection but it appears there is an opportunity to make this a stronger identifier. Research revealed that it should be emphasized.
4. The City of Elk River is an active marketing organization. There are a lot of communication efforts underway with its public which should be applauded. The scope of materials lack consistency from department to department. Part of effective branding is consistency in messaging and this should be evaluated within the context of the opportunities presented by the brand.
5. For outbound marketing (to non-residents) drivers passing through Elk River create a natural opportunity for billboards. Elk River should consider a timed message during peak seasons when travelers go Up North. The economic development world lives primarily in the digital space. Website communication is key (more detail follows in the digital footprint audit).

Digital Footprint Audit

This evaluation is intended to provide the brand client with an analysis of their reach and traction in digital media.

1. The City of Elk River is very active with social media. The number of departments engaged in creating profiles in social media may be fragmenting the City message. Ironically, more emphasis on less may create a stronger voice and generate more attention.
2. Wikipedia does a nice job of telling the Elk River story. Focused on the river and its heritage. There is an opportunity to contribute to this entry that adds the existing vision and brand direction.

3. A simple Google image search of Elk River reveals almost entirely pictures of fishing, outdoors, rivers and greenery. According the most visited site in the world, Elk River is about the outdoors.

4. The Elk River economic development website presence is difficult to find. It has practically no presence from the city home page. Therefore, if a site selector were looking for you, they'd probably leave. Once found, the Elk River EDA landing area still does not compete with other community economic development presentations. A small bit of research will show many examples of a typical economic development web presence. Simply put, if there's an emphasis placed on the presentation of Elk River economic development, it is assumed that it is a priority. Currently it does not make this statement. The Elk River Economic Development Authority needs a dedicated website.

5. A review of the City of Elk River home page using a "term extractor" reveals it tells search engines Elk River is about: river, city, elk, branding, goals, town, promotes, offering, natural, involved, historic river town, heritage, preservations, and unlimited opportunities. Nice!

The same review of the Elk River Chamber website reveals it tells search engines Elk River is about: river, elk, area, chamber, commerce, home, business, welcome, events, place, Otsego, nearby interstate and Leadership Elk River.

6. For the record, YES. Facebook and Twitter should both be strong tools for the near future in creating a dialogue (not broadcasting) with citizens and site selectors. Consideration should be given to the EDA social media properties on the development of a more formal plan and consistent voice that speaks to its intended audiences. Currently, it appears to be more focused on talking to the community. If that's not the intent, then attention should be given to adjusting how it can better engage site selectors and prospects.

On-Site Findings

The ChandlerThinks team toured Elk River for three days, April 27-29, 2011. The team visited many businesses, interviewed residents, business owners and local leadership from both the public and private sector. The form of discussions consisted of either one-on-one interviews, group discussion or "mystery shopper" interviews.

The main observations from this reconnaissance were:

1. An energy theme does permeate throughout the community. This has been a conscious effort and a result of setting Elk River up to be a forward-thinking community that embraces, and has been preparing for, the growing environmental needs of the world. This starts with Great River Energy and continues with its accolades for the first Gold LEED certified building in the state, the first Gold LEED certified elementary school and library in the state, the designation of being the state's official Energy City and the handful of businesses that embrace the ideals of energy efficiency in their operations (Cymbet for example). It was also very clear that the residents and businesses did not see a strong connection with the Energy City designation and how it impacted them. This includes the employees and leadership of the city.
2. There is a genuine love of the outdoors. The Mississippi River, Lake Orono, the several parks (especially Woodland Trails Park), Handke Pit, ERX Motorpark and the heritage of Kelly Farm. Elk River's connection to the outdoors is deliberate. It is one of the primary reasons why people enjoy living in Elk River. The largest of these assets, the Mississippi River, does not appear to be fully embraced to its full potential.
3. Downtown Elk River is the destination-focused center of community social life. Social living in Elk River is found in many places (churches, civic events, sporting events, school activities) but the place where the community desires to congregate is the downtown. People speak of its role in an affectionate manner but also with mild disappointment. This is a result of downtown Elk River's changing face from old to new (fires and development). People appear to deeply desire a master plan and vision for downtown, which is nearing 80% completion, that will once again make it the absolute center of its community life.
4. Transportation access is a community luxury. Elk River's location from the Twin Cities, the Minnesota outdoors (Up North) and easy highways make it convenient for businesses and residents to access anything that is desired in a relatively short time frame. The newly opened Northstar Transit Station opens another new transportation opportunity to and from the Twin Cities. This is still to be accepted since it has limited hours of operation. It is clear that the "close enough" description is another driver for why people live and do business in Elk River.
5. Business strength appears to be in light industrial, precision machining, plastics thermoforming and business park developments to attract compatible businesses.

6. Elk River likes itself (which is fantastic for a community and sometimes not the case). It sees its personality as more laid-back and relaxed but not lazy. It works hard to get things done and likes to be thought of as a progressive, smaller community.

7. Elk River can “walk the talk” with their everyday caring and compassion for others (Guardian Angels, church groups and prayer sessions). This seems to be an intrinsic and innate characteristic that serves them well during good and bad times.

Attitude Awareness and Perception Study

One of the best ways to uncover your brand identity is to ask outsiders around you. Your neighbors probably know you best, and ultimately perception is reality. We went to the Twin Cities and randomly sampled people to learn what they think of Elk River. An internet survey was conducted among 200 consumers in the Minneapolis market allowing for a margin of error of +/- 7.04% at a 95% confidence level.

The top-line findings from this study were:

- When asked, *"What comes to mind when you think of communities within an hour drive north of Minneapolis/Twin Cities?"*, the top answers were: St. Cloud, Hinckley, Elk River, and Maple Grove.
- When asked, *"What comes to mind when you think of Elk River?"*, the top responses were: small town, Mississippi River, traffic and Highway 10.
- BEST PHRASE OR ADJECTIVE DESCRIPTION: Respondents felt the best phrase or adjective to describe Elk River, Minnesota was outdoorsy. Outdoorsy was followed by small, well-located and safe.
- VISITATION FREQUENCY: Just under one-third (29%) of the respondents plan to visit Elk River in the next year. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of respondents have visited Elk River in the last three years. Of those, forty percent (40%) have visited four or more times during that period.
- PURPOSE OF TRIP: Thirty-eight percent (38%) of the respondents who traveled to Elk River, Minnesota were on a leisure trip. Thirty-three percent (33%) stopped over on the way somewhere else.
- TRIP ACTIVITIES: Top trip activities included eating at restaurants (59%), visiting Downtown Elk River (32%) and shopping (28%).
- GREATEST ASSET OF ELK RIVER, MINNESOTA: Respondents stated that the greatest asset of Elk River is the casual/laid-back feel. Casual/laid-back feel was followed by proximity of Minneapolis, outdoor opportunities and the Mississippi River.
- MATCHING DESCRIPTION: A river town was the highest-rated character description of Elk River with a mean score of 7.74. A river town was followed by a casual/laid-back community (7.57), a clean community (7.45) and a safe community (7.23).
- ASSET RATINGS: The highest rated assets in Elk River among respondents were outdoor opportunities (7.43), lakes (7.05) and Northstar Railroad (7.02).

- **MOST DISTINGUISHABLE CHARACTERISTICS:** Respondents felt that outdoorsy (7.53) and relaxed (7.22) are the most distinguishable characteristics of Elk River, Minnesota.
- **REPUTATION TO OUTSIDERS:** The reputation of Elk River to outsiders is small (44%), lakes/rivers (35%), friendly (33%) and quiet (32%).

ESRI Tapestry

ESRI Tapestry allows us to view a socio-economic profile of residents in a geographic location. This annually updated data reveals which products and services consumers buy. Approximately 90 variables in 15 categories such as apparel, food, and financial are included. We use this as part of the Brand Compass branding program for one simple reason - the cultural lifestyle and life stages of a community reveals its identity. The result is a *Who Report* that tells us who you are and a *What Report* that tells us what you consume, like, buy, etc.

WHO REPORT: Tapestry segmentation reveals the following profiles for Elk River:

Up and Coming Families (40%)

- median age of 31.9
- higher income families
- young families working their way up to success
- higher-end homes strong presence of children; schools are important
- active in sports and outdoors such as mountain biking
- enjoy family vacations

Sophisticated Squires (29.1%)

- media age of 38.4
- married couples and very affluent
- highly educated
- a mix of Gen Xers and Baby Boomers
- big purchasers of new cars and nice homes
- willing to invest in homes further with improvements and landscaping

Enterprising Professionals (14.9%)

- young, single, married working professionals
- media age 32.4
- educated (50% have degree)
- very active and frequently move to larger metro areas for growth
- very mobile and on the go
- very tech savvy

Simple Living (9.7%)

- media age is 41.3
- built equity in their homes over the long haul and saved their hard-earned dollars
- only 15% have a bachelor's degree or higher
- enjoy the simple things and exercising their passions whether it be music, woodworking or fishing
- buy essentials and an occasional treat for rewarding their own hard work
- computers and gadgets are not important

Main Street (6.3%)

- median age is 36.8
- a mix of households: married, single, shared, single-parent
- common groups in suburbs of smaller cities
- live in older housing
- family-oriented and frugal
- often fix up home and keep it up with small things like planting bulbs
- they are online but not highly active

WHAT REPORT: Following are the top high and low indices for each of the 35+ categories. What does it tell us about Elk River?

- Apparel scores reveal an active business environment (men's business apparel high). It also indicates you are active outdoors with athletic shoes and women's swimsuits indexing high. The high indices for children's clothes indicate the presence of many young families.
- High indices for hot tubs and fireplace indicate homes are a priority and people like to enjoy them. Low scores in portable air conditioners and dishwashers are indicative of a higher value home.
- Automobile scores indicate you like to buy new vehicles and often rent trucks to haul personal items. You also take great care of your vehicles, preferring to have dealer service them over a chain discount store like Wal-Mart. You also spend more on tires (perhaps indicative of the need for winter care).
- You are more likely to own baby equipment such as a crib, stroller and car seat all indicative of a strong community filled with young families.
- The alcoholic beverages consumed by Elk River are higher for wine, tequila, wine coolers and low calorie beer than it is for gin and cheap whiskey. This means you like to have fun and willing to pay a little more.
- Elk River is more likely to buy self-help books showing you are driven in reaching your goals. You also index high for children's books.
- Elk River is a savvy camera community ranking high for owning nice cameras. Perhaps it's because the people of Elk River like to capture photos of the outdoors.
- The people of Elk River are a little more likely to get involved than most other cities. It ranks high for writing letters to the editor and engaging in fundraising activities. Elk River cares about helping others. It does not however, rank very high for being a part of environmental groups. That is surprising given its connection to the outdoors.
- Electronics rank high for Elk River. TV's, video cameras and software. Elk River is tech savvy. It also ranks high for activity on the internet.

- *Financially, high rankings in home equity line of credit and having a 2nd mortgage again reveals younger families moving up the ladder. They often over-extend themselves. This is also strong when home owners want to invest further in making home improvements. Elk River also is comfortable accessing finances over the internet.*
- Home maintenance is important to Elk River. It ranks high in garden categories and lawn care. It spends money on trimmers, insecticides and landscaping. It also ranks high in home improvement categories. Elk River likes to invest in its homes.
- Elk River spends more on food than most communities. It shops at higher end grocers and higher end restaurants. This shows it is sophisticated in tastes but likes to balance having it prepared by someone else or doing it themselves. Elk River would be a great place for food-driven events like tastings and cooking classes, and high-end cooking retail.
- Elk River ranks very low in many of the personal care categories traditional filled by an older population.
- Insurance categories are high. An indicator that Elk River invests in its future and has the money to do it.
- Leisure interests include family vacations to theme parks as well as trips to Vegas. Elk River enjoys rock concerts, movies and the beach. Not surprisingly, it ranks very high in many travel categories.
- Elk River radio indices shows it is more likely than most to enjoy classic hits, soft adult contemporary, sports and news talk. It also is very low in pueblo radio, classical and Hispanic radio. This may reveal that even though Elk River has high income it is more down-to-earth in its interests.
- Television activity is more likely than other cities to center around educational cable such as Discovery Channel, The Learning Channel and HGTV. It also enjoys sports programming. It is not as likely to watch daytime syndicated programs like Judge Judy or Jerry Springer Show.
- Pets are important to Elk River. It ranks higher for going to the vet and using dog treats (plus owning a dog). By the way, it appears Elk River is more about dogs than cats.
- Elk River spends more money on business-related retail stores like Office Depot, OfficeMax and FedEx Kinko's.
- It is active in sports. Elk River plays golf, does aerobics, mountain biking and attends football and hockey events. Although it's near the outdoors, Elk River does not rank high for hunting related categories.

Evaluation

Brand Truths

The purpose of conducting internal and external redundant research and gaining knowledge about Elk River from various perspectives is to uncover the undeniable truths of its identity. We've identified these truths as the fundamental drivers for crafting the Elk River brand identity.

The key brand truths for Elk River are:

- **Elk River defines itself by its manageable size, its connection to the outdoors and its proximity between the Twin Cities and Up North.**
Its size. The outdoor country lifestyle. The access to city amenities or more country. All research led to these three same defining characteristics.
- **Elk River lacks a strong identity outside of Elk River.**
The Attitude Awareness and Perception study revealed that many outsiders really do not know you very well. Luckily, your name tells them a lot. There is a river connection and there are probably elk. Oh well, at least 1 of 2 is accurate.
- **Outsiders that do know you, ALSO see Elk River as casual-laid back, outdoorsy small town.** Those that have visited Elk River have a strong association with some of your greatest assets - your relaxed way of living and your connection to the outdoors.
- **Elk River's downtown, despite its challenges, serves as your sense of place and identity.** Downtown Elk River provides an authentic experience many other communities wish they had. This is, and should be, the center of Elk River's community voice.
- **Elk River really is where the city and country flow together.**
The sign listing this line worked. The people of Elk River repeat it often. The good news is that it is true. This balance provides the standard of living that businesses and residents expect and enjoy.
- **Your name creates expectations - Elk River.**
Sometimes we take for granted the power of a name. Elk River communicates this is a place connected to the river. It says it is an outdoor centered community. This creates an expectation and a nice platform for managed progress. Other communities would be so lucky.
- **Your nature energizes people and businesses.**
The river literally creates energy. Not just for power but for the inspiration that drives a city to succeed. The trails and other outdoor amenities enjoyed by Elk River give the people their passion. This passion motivates entrepreneurs, students and inspires compassion throughout the community that is very impressive. Elk River cares. It is powered by its nature.

Brand Profile

We've learned that Elk River is not just one thing. It is defined by its people, the river, its outdoor trails and parks, its culture, the businesses that are driving the economy, the creative energy of the arts and the students, and much more. The brand profile chart below shows how all of these things work together. Mapped out, a lot of connections can be made that reveal Elk River's distinct look and feel.



Brand Marketing Platform

The intent of going through a branding exercise is to learn your story. The Elk River Marketing Platform begins to tell this story according to its brand truths. From this platform we can begin to weave in the emotional benefits of the community with its functional benefits.

At a bend in the northern-most point of the mighty Mississippi River, set just above its banks, the City of Elk River has long staked a claim to the lush woods, hills and waters that sustain and invigorate its character and gives rise to a friendly downtown on a well-travelled highway north to the recreation lakes. Effortlessly straddling their proximity to the Twin Cities and their place in the Minnesota heartland, Elk River is energized by their bountiful natural resources, abundant open spaces, the power of innovation, an exhilarating outdoor lifestyle and an authentic, caring heart.

Brand Promise Statement

(frequently called a Positioning Statement)

Managing and guiding a brand requires "bar" for measurement. We use a brand promise statement to help singularly define the brand and serve as the measurement for all brand decisions moving forward. It should be rooted in truth but offer aspiration. It should reflect a community's heritage but also its vision for the future. It must be inspirational and differentiating.

The brand promise statement is crafted by four fundamental pillars:

1. Who is most likely looking for what you are?

If someone is looking for a coastal town to relocate you will not be considered. We want to define ourselves by the types of people we want to attract.

2. Where do you compete (location and size)?

This is a factual description of our city within the context of the playing field we will be considered. With the exception of destinations that compete on a national or international scale, this is normally limited to a geographic scope.

3. What can you promise better than anyone else?

This is the heart of your brand. What can Elk River promise to deliver better than anyone else in its competitive set? This should be functional and emotional.

4. How does your promise make people feel?

Simply put, why would someone care about your brand promise. There has to be a reason they should care.

The Elk River Brand Promise Statement

For people who want to breathe the outdoors, yet want access to big city amenities, Elk River is an emerging small city where the Elk and Mississippi Rivers flow together on the fringe of the Twin Cities and where the heart is powered by its nature so you are energized and inspired to make a difference.

Elk River Brand Expression

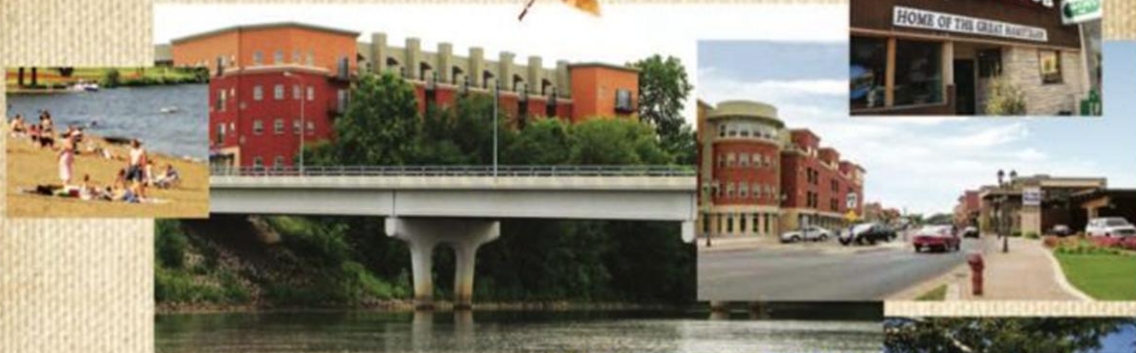
Although not included in the Elk River Scope of Work, expressing the brand in powerful and compelling ways that move people and connect Elk River with strong reputation-building imagery and words and phrases is all about creative interpretation. And it is the inspiration and the foundation for developing an effective Implementation Plan.

Compelling messages, visual translations, story boards, stories and words and phrases that define and distinguish Elk River, Minnesota is beyond a logo and tagline. In combination, the *Powered by Nature* expression brings Elk River and the Elk River brand to life.



The Brand Navigator continues this interpretation with strategies and tactics designed to build this reputation for Elk River.

CITY OF ELK RIVER POWERED BY NATURE



Downtown & Community

- Friendly downtown
- Downtown commerce & community
- Sherburne County Fair
- Clean, safe community
- Great festivals, concerts and events
- Diverse, well educated
- Proximity to Twin Cities
- Ambiance of historic river town








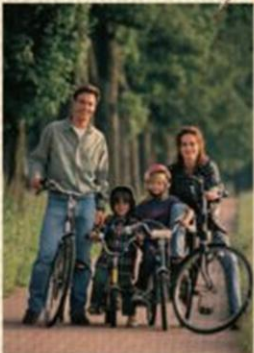


CITY OF ELK RIVER POWERED BY NATURE



Business-Energized Naturally

- ERX Motor Park
- Northstar
- Close proximity to Twin Cities
- Sportech
- Target
- Sand & gravel industry
- Kelly Farm
- Cargill





CITY OF ELK RIVER
POWERED BY NATURE

CONNECTION TO THE OUTDOORS

- Orono Lake
- Woodland trails and parks
- Clean - green community
- Outdoorsy small town feel
- Plenty of land
- Abounding in natural beauty
- Family outdoor activities
- Fishing & hunting
- Mississippi River

Community Profile

The Community Profile section summarizes and consolidates the strengths, assets, amenities and natural and man-made influences which give Elk River its character.

- **Origin**

Zebulon Pike travelled through the area on his way west and recorded his name for the area based on the herds of elk he saw in the forests. Elk River's rise as a community began with David Faribault establishing a trading post in 1846 where the Mississippi and Elk Rivers converge. The trading post took on significance for the westward migration because of its proximity to the Red River Trail – safe, well-worn Ox Cart trails providing trade routes for early settlers in the northern states and Canadian provinces from the 1820's through the 1870's until replaced by trains. In 1851, the power of the Elk River was harnessed by a New Englander, Ard Godfrey, who built a dam and operated a sawmill. In turn, this dam created ponds and what is now Lake Orono. And more New Englanders followed him swelling the population in the latter half of the 19th century. Lumber and millwork took a back seat to agriculture and agriculture industries like a starch mill fueled by potato farming. With growth came challenges including a number of devastating fires which destroyed much of the early architecture. Becoming the official Sherburne County seat in 1872, the arrival of the railroad changed Elk River's dependence on the rivers for trade and transportation. Of special note, Elk River's leadership always embraced the power of energy and connections to transform. A new dam was built on the Elk River in 1915 providing the first electricity to the town; in 1960, the first nuclear power plant in the United States went online at the Great River Energy site; and, an Elk River native commissioned the first statewide network of paved roads.

- **Location**

The City of Elk River sits neatly on the fringes of the Twin Cities - Minneapolis and St. Paul, 34 miles northwest, and at northern head of the great Mississippi River where it converges with the Elk River. Its total land area is just shy of 44 square miles and its geography and vegetation is composed of a combination of lush, hardwood forests, shallow valleys and rolling hills. The City is bordered on the south by the Mississippi River which bends at the edge of Downtown Elk River.



- **Demographics**

Showing slow, steady growth since 2000, with a slight dip in 2008, Elk River continues to enjoy a stable population and a positive trajectory. At the 2010 US Census, Elk River recorded a population of 22,974. The median age is 32.8 years, five years younger than the state average age of 37 years. The median household income skews high at \$70,517, much higher than the state average of \$56,704 and much higher than the US average of \$46,326. The racial composition of the community is 97% White, 1% Hispanic with the remaining 2% equally divided among African Americans, Native Americans and Asians. Over 68% of the population is descended from European ancestry primarily German, Norwegian, Swedish and Irish. The average family size is 3.24. 31% of the population is under age 18, 8.5% is 18-24, 33.9% is 25-44, 18.3% is 45-64 and 8% were 65 and older. The ratio of females to males is 51% to 49%.

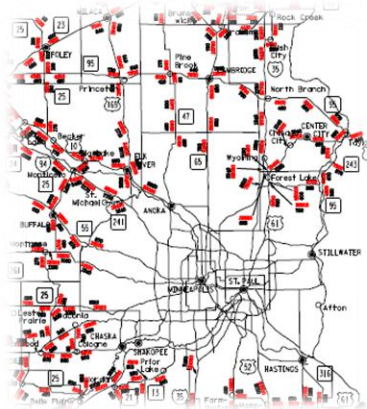
- **Economic Composition**

Elk River has made a determined effort to develop specific industry clusters that reflect their location and quality of life. Principal among these industries are energy and energy-related companies, plastics, precision machinery, casting and thermoforming, data centers and business parks accommodating light industrial and low impact industries – sports products, technology and precision instruments and materials. The independent school district and Sherburne County governments are the single biggest employers.

- **Transportation & Accessibility**

U.S. Highway 10 and U.S. Highway 169 junction in Elk River. U.S. Highway 10 is the northwesterly route to the Minnesota lakes and vacation playgrounds for those living in Minneapolis and St. Paul. As a consequence, these highways, situated at the perimeter of downtown Elk River, are highly trafficked during the weekends and summer and fall vacation periods. State Highway 101 ends at U.S. Highway 10 and it connects the area and these highways with Interstate 94 which is seven miles to the south of Elk River. County roads 12, 13, 1 and 33 traverse north-south and east-west throughout the Elk River footprint.

Data from the Minnesota Transportation Department depicts a graphic representation of the high traffic counts on the Elk River highways at over 10,000 cars daily.



Elk River is served by a high speed commuter link to the Twin Cities called Northstar Commuter Rail. Although ridership for 2010 was down 21% to projections, over 710,400 people rode the commuter. The Elk River Station is among those with the highest boarding figures.

- **Quality of Life**

The residents and visitors to Elk River enjoy an enviable quality of life. Served by three high schools, two middle schools, four elementary schools and one private Catholic school located in the Elk River city limits, the Elk River Area School District educates over 12,000 K-12 students. Class size averages 23 students per classroom and the schools routinely rank at or better than statewide averages for performance and proficiency in math and reading. The City of Elk River has 44 parks totaling nearly 900 acres. Athletic complexes serve the needs of both youth and adult sports. Elk River has a mountain bike park, cross country ski trails and a biathlon course as well as the traditional neighborhood parks with play equipment and sports courts. River's Edge Commons, a Mississippi riverfront park with a splash fountain, gazebo and amphitheater, is a prime gathering spot and concert and performance venue. A full service Police Department fields 31 sworn officers with a support staff of seven. The Fire Department employs a full-time Chief and over forty, trained on-call firefighters. The downtown area is compact and hospitable offering dining, entertainment and shopping options and complemented by a City-driven revitalization project including The Bluffs of Elk River and Jackson Plaza. Cable Channel 12 broadcasts Council and Committee meetings as well as special programming focusing on environmental issues and recreational activities and programs. The City owns and manages its own municipal utilities systems including power, water and sewage treatment plants. The Elk River Star News is a well-read weekly newspaper delivered to every home in Elk River. The Elk River Library is a LEED Gold Certified building and part of the Great River Regional Library System.

- **Climate**

The year-round climate of Elk River offers a four-season experience reflecting the northern location of the State of Minnesota and the City of Elk River. The winter months of December–February post an average temperature of 26 degrees with an accumulative total of 35 snow days recorded. The spring months of March–May average 56 degrees. The summer months of June–August average 81 degrees. The fall months of September–November average 66 degrees.

ELK RIVER AVERAGE WEATHER BY MONTH

Month	Temperature				Average Rainfall		Average snow days	Average Fog days
	Average		Absolute		Daily	Monthly		
	max	min	max	min				
January	24.3	4.1	54.0	-40.0	0.5	14.7	12	11
February	28.8	7.0	55.0	-40.0	0.5	14.2	10	10
March	40.5	19.0	79.0	-20.0	1	31	9	12
April	57.6	31.8	91.4	2.8	2.3	70.2	4	7
May	70.3	43.7	98.1	21.0	2.7	84.2	0	8
June	79.3	53.6	98.6	32.0	3.2	95.3	0	9
July	83.1	57.7	100.9	41.0	2.7	84.8	0	10
August	81.1	55.2	100.9	33.1	2.8	85.8	0	13
September	72.9	47.3	93.0	21.9	2.6	77.4	0	10
October	59.7	35.2	89.1	12.9	1.9	58.1	2	8
November	41.0	21.9	75.0	-10.1	1.2	35.3	8	10
December	27.7	8.6	61.0	-32.8	0.5	15.7	13	13

- **Community & Area Assets**

The chief asset of Elk River is the high regard with which residents hold their community. They exhibit a common caring and heart for their residents and neighbors (witness the high profile of Guardian Angels and twenty two churches and volunteer activity) and a palpable pride about their lifestyle, quality of life, neighborhoods and the serenity and comforts of their community and natural environment. Elk River's location at the convergence of US Highway 10 and 169, its proximity to the Twin Cities and its location on the banks of the Mississippi and Elk Rivers are great strategic advantages. These advantages are leveraged to court and develop cutting edge innovation and sustainable practices in energy and recycling.

Elk River is blessed with extraordinary natural beauty and man-made (and/or maintained) assets. Reflecting the relaxed, invigorating outdoor lifestyle that is so prized in this area, Elk River carved out Hillside City Park, six miles of mountain bike trails through 80 acres of forest and the Woodland Trails with 330 acres of parks and trails among dense woods, prairies and wetlands. Three sports complexes - Oak Knoll, Orono and Youth Athletic Complex offer two soccer fields, seven baseball or softball fields, four lighted softball fields and a BMX track. Lake Orono Park offers swimming, boating fishing and canoeing as well as picnic areas and field areas for sports events. The Ice Arena offers an Olympic sized rink that is home to league hockey, figure skating and inline skating. The Pinewood Golf Course is a 9 hole executive course open to the public. The YMCA offers a full service health and sports complex including four lighted softball fields. Handke Park or "The Pit" is a traditional, multi-

generational community meeting spot with events and activities scheduled year-round including outdoor circuit ice skating in the winter months. The ERX Motorpark is a relatively new attraction for motorbike enthusiasts but growing. The Sherburne County Fair is held each year at the 100 year old Fairgrounds located in Elk River. The 1920's Red Top water tower just received a state grant for renovation to be retained as a community landmark. The Oliver H. Kelley Farm is an authentic 1860's agricultural experience and the birthplace of The Grange. Open during the summer and weekends in May and September, the Minnesota Historical Society's Museum sets the stage for understanding the value of the farm community and hands on experiences in the field provide visitors with a taste of real life on the farm. The Northstar Business Park and Gateway Business Park are prime examples of Elk River's emphasis on light industrial development. Although the economic recession intersected with the City's plans for revitalizing the Downtown, the resulting living spaces and retail and restaurant space will ultimately help Elk River reinvigorate the Downtown once the economy starts to surge again.

- **Competitive Overview**

Elk River finds itself in competition with the surrounding communities of Ramsey, Maple Grove, Rogers, Otsego, Big Lake, Monticello, St. Michael, Albertville and Coon Rapids for economic development (start-ups and relocations), residential choice and regional retail and dining business. While it is generally believed that Elk River has the best overall, competitive package, Coon Rapids is known for nicer neighborhoods, Maple Grove possesses a high end retail experience, the taxes are lower in Rogers, Otsego has more dining choices and more "ready" commercial and residential parcels, St. Michael has an authentic downtown core and Albertville has less traffic congestion. The availability of land, land prices, tax structures and incentives are not level which requires Elk River to compensate with creative incentives.

BRAND NAVIGATOR

The Brand Navigator is designed to help Elk River navigate through the process of organizing, seeding, launching, building, sustaining and extending the Elk River brand as a powerful brand identity and reputation-building strategy.

The strategies and tactics recommended here will provide the Elk River community with the tools they need to influence their internal community building goals as well as energize their external economic development goals.

I. Building the Brand Organization

For a brand to take root, grow and flourish, leadership is essential. A group of public and private sector people and organizations must be dedicated to the brand's success and accept responsibility for it, make it a priority, rally others to its ownership and do those things necessary to sustain its potential and power. Passion, drive and enthusiasm are key components of successful branding but someone, or a designated group, must assume responsibility for sustaining a solid foundation for brand development, implementation and accountability.

Strategy: Establish the organizational structure required for developing, implementing, promoting and sustaining the Brand in Elk River.

Tactics

1. Take Ownership.

While the Elk River brand is organically derived from the strengths of the community, it must be championed and nurtured to take root and thrive. Building community identity and reputation takes time, commitment – and leadership. A community brand will have many fans and, hopefully, many followers. But every successful brand needs a leader. This leadership organization will reflect the combined strengths of the public and private sectors to champion the brand. It's primary purpose and mission is to accept responsibility for the brand promotion and strategic potential with stakeholders determined to advance, protect and promote the brand identity and reputation of Elk River.

- **Assemble the Elk River Brand Navigators.**

Using the brand as a rallying point and common platform, assemble the right people to take "ownership" of the brand and serve as Brand Navigators. This leadership group will launch, oversee and manage the brand throughout the community. With this leadership in place, the brand messaging, decision-making, coordination, integration and implementation will be more easily launched, monitored and measured.

- *Enthusiasm, Commitment and Connections.* Those selected for this vitally important leadership role must believe in the brand and its power to transform Elk River internally and externally. Each person brought into this circle must be enthusiastic about the brand and its opportunities. Each person must be committed to do what is necessary to launch the brand and sustain it. Each person must be in a position of authority and decision-making in their organizations. And each person must be willing to articulate the power and potential of a unified community brand and influence those within their network to adopt the brand to extend its potential.

- *Recruit Key Stakeholders.* The key stakeholders in Elk River that will determine the effectiveness of the community brand are the City of Elk River, particularly its elected officials and management in Administration, Municipal Utilities, Parks & Recreation, Community Development, Public Works and the Police Department, the Elk River Economic Development Authority, The Chamber, River's Edge Business Association, Arts Alliance, representatives from the private sector including a cross-section of dominant industry clusters, commercial and residential realtors, Northstar Commuter Rail, Elk River Area School District, community leadership and service organizations and the Star News.

With these organizations and key stakeholders in place and participating, the Elk River brand will be launched, seeded and sustained throughout the community and in a variety of interesting, exciting and memorable ways.

- *Make It Real for Stakeholders.* Use simple organizational tools to connect the stakeholders to the brand. Produce a high quality lapel pin featuring the Elk River brand and branded business cards for each stakeholder. The cards will carry the Elk River stakeholder's name organization. This and connectedness brand's promise. and using the card people, organizations the brand.



brand and tagline *and* the and company or solidifies the brand synergy necessary to propel the Encourage wearing the pin when making calls on and businesses on behalf of

- *Skill & Experience Matrix.* While distinguished participants are integral to the brand launch and maintenance, take the time to construct a simple Skills & Experience Matrix. This matrix will help you to easily identify areas of strength that can then be aligned with specific tasks and tactics associated with implementing this Plan.

- ***Appoint or hire a Chief Brand Navigator.***

Ideally, the position of Brand Navigator would be a newly created and funded position reporting to the Chair of the Elk River Brand Navigators. However, if practical or necessary, a suitable alternative is to assign the brand implementation and leadership to a current organizational leader with the capacity and skills to accept these additional responsibilities.

- *It's a full-time job.* The internal and external branding of a community is a full-time job. If done well, the work of laying the groundwork for a brand launch, sustaining a brand, maintaining its influence and integration and extending the brand is a full-time job. Elk River and the brand are best served by the dedicated attention and driving force of full-time leadership capable of implementing, coordinating and managing the programs identified in this Brand Plan.
- *Alternatives and Options.* If Elk River is unable to fund a full-time, dedicated position, the Elk River Brand Navigators may consider one of the following alternatives to help them implement the Plan:
 - Identify the most qualified leader willing to take on the additional leadership responsibilities of the brand management along with his/her other full-time organizational responsibilities. Ideally, this person will be engaged in integrating the brand in their organization.
 - Create a triumvirate of three, skilled, willing members of the Elk River Navigators who will agree to share the branding responsibilities: Internal Branding; External Branding; Brand Integration.
 - Identify a local SCORE member who possesses the talent, skill set and enthusiasm necessary to work pro-bono to help launch and sustain the brand.

- ***Create a Community Brand Foundation.***

Particularly in the case of a Community Brand, creating a tax-exempt 501 c Elk River Community Foundation to house and headquarter the brand - the Brand Navigators, brand initiatives and programs - is often the most effective way to separate, yet unite, the public and private stakeholders in a common mission. A non-profit 501 c will protect the assets of the stakeholders and avoid the potential political pitfalls or liabilities associated with either real or perceived City or private sector ownership.

- *Foundation Resources.* Resources included here will help you define and organize your best 501 c category, most likely 501 c (6) Business

Organizations. The provisions of a 501 c (3) may be too limiting but worth exploring.

- IRS Resource: <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/eotopick03.pdf>
- Grant Space: <http://grantspace.org/Tools/Knowledge-Base/Nonprofit-Management/Establishment/Starting-a-nonprofit>

- *Foundation References.* Samples of similar Community Foundations and their programs include:
 - Three Rivers Foundation: <http://www.trcommunityfoundation.org/>
 - Oklahoma City Foundation: <http://www.occf.org/index.html>
 - Kansas City Foundation: <http://www.gkccf.org/>
 - Palmdale Foundation: <http://www.cityofpalmdale.org/foundation/>
- *Flexibility is Key to Foundation Construction.* This Plan provides the Brand Navigators with a wide variety, depth and scope of community branding opportunities, features and programs from volunteer-driven activities to brick and mortar to marketing. When crafting the By-Laws, mission statement and vision for the Foundation build in sufficient flexibility so that the Foundation can keep pace with the community branding initiatives and those future opportunities that will arise.

- ***Designate a Brand Spokesperson.***

Once the brand is delivered, the local press and other community organizations will want to know more. Be prepared by designating an official brand spokesperson or spokespersons. This person or persons will enthusiastically articulate the Elk River brand and its opportunities and stay “on message” to introduce the media and their listeners and readers to the brand, its uses, its purpose and its promise.

- *Making the Choice.* Usually, the Chief Brand Navigator becomes the primary spokesperson for the brand. However, it can also be a member or two of the Elk River Brand Navigators who are well-respected and well-spoken.
 - Whether it is the Brand Navigator or member(s) of the Elk River Brand Navigators, the Brand Spokesperson must agree to speak only for the brand and its opportunities.
 - Arrange that the designated spokesperson receive a full briefing about the brand, brand platform and rationale.
 - Provide basic media training to include brand talking points, imagery and Plan highlights.
 - Role play with the spokesperson to prepare him/her before media and organizational interviews.

2. Lay a Strong Foundation.

The Elk River Brand Navigators are a powerful force for brand resonance and relevance in the community. This group of people will optimize the brand's influence and integration in and throughout the community.

- **Organize the Brand Implementation**

At the outset of brand planning and implementation, make the commitment to meet regularly and with purpose.

- *Set a monthly meeting schedule.* It is recommended that monthly meetings be planned so that the actual work associated with the details and activities of brand development and implementation occur at a meeting dedicated to this purpose.
- *Stay on task.* Each meeting agenda must reflect focus. Each Brand Navigators Meeting should reflect the priorities, timelines and tasks associated with launching and implementing the brand Plan.
- *Build in accountability.* Each Brand Navigator will be expected to assume one or more responsibilities associated with brand implementation. This responsibility must imply accountability. At the first sign that a Brand Navigator is not contributing satisfactorily or failing to meet deadlines, the Brand Navigators must take action to compensate (arrange for a partner or small group to assist) or re-assign tasks.

- **Understand the Scope of Work.**

A community brand is about building and sustaining a reputation. It is not a marketing campaign. Recognize the scope of work required to properly launch and implement the brand. The launch is just the beginning. Keeping the brand promise alive and relevant requires patience, persistence and dedication.

- *Prepare for the long haul.* Prepare the City, Elk River Brand Navigators, other organizations and the community for the long haul. Branding is not a quick fix. Branding is a promise which must be cultivated to the state of a culture – a way of doing business, a way of thinking, a dedication to specific messaging and a commitment to repetition in all communications.
- *Identify Support Staff.* Little gets done in the real world without competent, capable and reliable support staff. While the Chief Brand Navigator will be absorbed in the organizational and networking required to build a strong foundation for the brand implementation, he/she will need reliable help with the administrative and communications work associated with launching and sustaining the brand.
 - Administrative and Communications Support. Clerical, administrative and mid-level communications management support will be necessary to

achieve the tasks associated with this Plan's strategies and tactics. Ideally, administrative and communications support should be dedicated which allows an unfettered focus on brand development.

- If this option is unavailable, identify and assemble a team of support staff from among participating Elk River Brand Navigators who will agree to accept responsibility for specific tasks associated with the brand. This approach will require coordination and oversight.
- *Implementation Chart.* Use the Strategy and Tactics Implementation chart included with this Plan to assign and identify the pathways of responsibility, tasks, assignments and timelines.
- ***Set basic guidelines for the Chief Brand Navigator.***

The Brand Navigators must invest a level of confidence and authority in the Chief Brand Navigator so that he/she can lead and manage the overall brand implementation, policies and programs.

 - *Authority.* What can he/she do, commit to, promise or extend on behalf of the organization? What are the specific expectations for the Brand Navigator? How will the organization manage proposed brand activities or projects brought to the attention of the Brand Navigator? Who is responsible for creative interpretation, advertising material development and media placements? (*Brand Navigator job description is included in Resource section*)
- ***Coach the Brand.***

Take the time to roll-out the brand in a formal and orchestrated forum. The brand's reach and potential depend upon the ability of the Elk River Brand Navigators to understand, embrace and articulate the brand's implications, brand promise, internal and external applications and how to interpret it in daily activity.

 - *Host a half-day Branding Retreat.* Use the arrival of the Brand Compass and Brand Navigator as an opportunity to focus on the brand platform, positioning statement, messaging and all the opportunities inherent in it for Elk River.
 - *Make it fun.* Send the participants a set of trivia questions about Elk River in advance that will illuminate information, interesting facts and impressions collected and uncovered during the branding process. Ask participants to offer interpretations of how the brand will help clarify, explain or counter the trivia.
 - *Collect experiences.* Get the participants involved in helping you define the Elk River experience. Ask attendees to share their most memorable moments in Elk River, while at a sports or cultural event or volunteering in the community. Collect these stories for posting on the branded website – they will add dimension, texture and depth to the Elk River story.

- *Where and Why?* Ask participants to think about where and why they take visiting family and friends. Ask them to describe how they felt, what were the sights, sounds, smells and tastes they remember most. Ask them where they go to reflect, get re-connected, re-charge; where they go to eat, hang-out, spend time with friends – what are the benefits they get from these times?
- ***Build brand traction.***

Challenge the Elk River Brand Navigators to identify other stakeholder organizations. Every public and private sector organization in Elk River can benefit from employing the Elk River brand. And from this synergy, the Elk River brand draws the oxygen and energy it needs to breathe and grow.

 - *Identify other people and organizations.* Downtown businesses, locally-owned stores and entrepreneurial enterprises, restaurants and services; Historical Society, Water Tower champions, compatible environmental and industry groups, realtor groups, service and social organizations—any organizations engaged directly or indirectly in providing products or services or contributing to the energy and quality of life of Elk River are priority targets.
 - *Develop preliminary ideas for collaboration.* This Plan will recommend a variety of opportunities for collaboration associated with the brand integration. While the Brand Navigators will benefit from approaching a potential organization with an open mind, it will be more productive to have specific, compatible and synergistic brand projects in mind when meeting.
 - *Assign the right people to make the calls.* Select volunteers with direct knowledge or connections with influencers in an organization to make preliminary contact, set a meeting and make a brief presentation.
- ***Use Task Forces to build capacity.***

Establish a set of Task Forces to get the brand work done. Using the Skills & Experience Matrix, identify the best talent among the Elk River Brand Navigators to lead tactic-driven Task Forces. The Brand Navigator will work with these Task Forces to build capacity to accelerate brand launch and integration.

 - *Prioritize Task Forces.* A new brand is a great temptation. People will want to take it and run with it, and while this enthusiasm is valuable, not all tasks associated with a brand and its implementation are created equal. While urgency is desirable, it will serve Elk River well to remember that organizing, laying the groundwork and establishing a good foundation for the brand launch and its maintenance is the #1 priority.
 - *Focus on Priorities.* Consider the following Task Forces for early assignment:
 - *Brand Management & Leadership*
 - *Funding & Resources*
 - *Internal Brand Launch*
 - *Brand Networking & Collaboration*
 - *External Brand Launch.*

- ***Extend the brand with Special Interest Stakeholder Groups.***

Every community has special interest groups and they will likely have their own ideas about how the brand can best be integrated and extended within their network. While some of these groups will be represented in other Task forces and Coalitions recommended in this Plan, identifying smaller, but important stakeholder groups will organically extend the brand's reach.

- *Identify the special interests.* Segment the interests in the community and put them to work identifying opportunities that intersect with their interests. This will extend the brand throughout layers of the community in an efficient way and build depth for the brand in expected and unexpected ways. In Elk River, these special interests could include:

- Energy and energy-related companies
- Go Green programs, recycling, environmentalists
- Agriculture and agricultural support organizations
- Small to medium size service and product businesses
- Elk River companies manufacturing products to "export" out of Elk River – Cargill, Sportech
- Arts, festival and cultural organizations
- Senior organizations and Activity Centers
- Education leaders
- Tourism products–attractions, hotels, retail, restaurants
- Commercial and residential brokers & realtors
- High School
- Neighborhood Associations
- Young Professionals
- Service Organizations
- Outdoor Lifestyle Enthusiasts – mountain bikers, cycling, motorbike, hiking, birders, boaters, fishermen, skiers, soft adventure groups
- Sports – indoor and outdoor group and individual activities

- *Identify Brand Messengers.* Assign a brand messenger to attend their meetings or encourage them to meet specifically to discuss the brand and its opportunities for their organizations. Again, go with thoughtful and appropriate brand programs in mind to supplement their ideas and concepts.

- ***Protect the Brand***

Seek trademark and copyright protection to the *Elk River* brand, imagery and tagline. The trademark and copyright provides Elk River with the rights to the brand logo and line, which allow the Elk River Brand Navigators to decide who and what entities can employ the brand logo and line and under what conditions and terms.

- *Value of Trademarking.* The trademark gives the merchandising rights for the brand logo and line which will be useful when approaching potential sponsors and marketing partners about developing events or branded merchandise.

- *Trademark Search.* An initial trademark search for the tagline *Powered by Nature* suggests that the tagline, used with the Elk River city name and logo, is available.
- *Develop Elk River Brand Style Guidelines.*
Now that the Elk River story has been identified and delivered, the Brand Navigators will want to develop a Style Guide. These Guidelines will set the terms for how the brand story should be told, interpreted, the fonts and color palettes you select and how logos can be used.
 - The Brand Story
 - Style guide to using and interpreting the logo and tagline
 - Brand identity colors
 - Approved fonts and font sizes for logo and tagline
 - Contact phone and e-mail for Brand Manager.
- *Establish a brand protocol.* The Brand Navigator must train and coach support staff and the Brand Navigators in the most productive and effective brand implementation and management. In the early stages of brand roll-out, it is recommended that the Brand Navigator approve the development, interpretation, production and distribution of any brand item or activity.
- ***Re-Calibrate after one year.***
After one year, take stock of progress and results attained to date. If the brand has been successfully launched and integrated into the community, consider monthly or quarterly meetings depending upon the strength and functional capacity of brand leadership.
 - *Sustain a regular meeting schedule.* Even with capable and competent brand management, the brand is the identity and reputation of Elk River and it requires attention, inspiration and collaboration.
 - *Keep Task Forces and Stakeholder Groups active and engaged.*
There are hundreds of brand-related activities, projects and programs to be launched, managed and sustained. Keep the Task Forces and Stakeholder Groups engaged in forward progress with regular meetings and agenda items that keep the meetings focused and on task.
 - *Host a "Brand View".* A year into the brand implementation, invite and re-engage the Brand Navigators, Task Forces, Stakeholder groups and other public and private sector partners to review brand progress and challenge participants to look forward for opportunities.

3. Build the Brand Navigation Messaging Package.

Telling the brand story to rally others to the brand cause requires internal “marketing” materials that are compelling, relevant and memorable. This cache of materials must be developed to answer the question, “*What’s in it for me.*” Achieving this will help you make the case that the brand is a true and authentic reflection of the community and build comfort and loyalty to the brand.

- ***Rolling Out the Elk River Story.***

Create a powerful PowerPoint presentation that tells the Elk River brand story. This PowerPoint will be your #1 tool and first impression of the brand as you unveil it to the first tier of community and business leadership to enlist them in the brand implementation. Its purpose is to position the brand and inspire viewers. The program must excite, entertain, educate and build enthusiasm. Components of the program include:

- *Share the brand process.* Summarize the depth and breadth of the brand process including surveys, research, key insights, findings and highlights so that people can follow the rationale for brand exploration and development.
- *Focus on Brand Compass Highlights*
 - Implications of the Research and Conclusions
 - The Brand Platform
 - Brand Promise
- *Focus on Brand Navigator Highlights*
 - Brand Navigator Organization
 - Telling the Elk River Story
 - The Brand as Marketing Platform
 - The Brand as Community Platform
 - The Brand as City and Economic Development Platform
 - The Brand as Catalyst for Public/Private Partnerships
- *Call to Action.* At the conclusion of the program include a specific Call to action designed to engage and motivate.
 - *I am energized for Elk River!*
 - *Sign me up for newsletters and activities.*
 - *My organization can/will commit resources and time to help market and extend the Elk River brand message.*
 - *I will network for the brand.*

- ***Develop an Elk River Brand Navigator's package.***

All Brand Navigators must receive a complete brand package so they are able to share and articulate the brand and translate its values and benefits. This package must include:

- Copy of the PowerPoint presentation (CD)
- One-page Brand Story
- Elk River brand creative developed to support the brand
- Preliminary "How-To" guide for integrating the brand promise and/or brand creative into businesses to support the brand roll-out and gain traction throughout the community
- Talking points for presentations and interviews
- Continually updated list of all sponsoring and participating organizations and businesses

- ***Develop a Business and Community Organization package.***

Create a Brand Navigation Messaging Package for wider distribution throughout the business community that includes:

- One-page Brand Story
- Copies or Camera-ready slick of the brand logo and tagline with a brief summary of the usage and standards.
- Brand Navigators website content and materials available.
- Preliminary "How-To" guide for integrating the brand into their businesses to support the brand roll-out and brand traction throughout the community to include: Introduction to the Brand; the Brand Promise; words and phrases that are integral to the brand; samples of how to connect the words and phrases with business, industry and organizations; available signature and supporter marketing materials; programs and activities with which organizations can connect.

- ***Develop a Media Kit.***

Create a communications package that describes the Elk River brand and its purpose and promise for distribution to local and regional media.

- Press Release
 - Brief description of brand process
 - One-page Brand Story highlighting research, findings, brand conclusions, platform
- Brand logo and tagline
- Q & A with the Chair of the Elk River Brand Navigators addressing the obvious questions:
 - *Why an Elk River brand?*
 - *Why now?*
 - *How does the Elk River brand promise, platform and positioning help Elk River distinguish itself?*
 - *How will Elk River use the brand?*
 - *What does Elk River expect from the brand?*
 - *How will the brand be employed?*
 - *What organizations support the brand process?*

- *How will organizations, businesses and residents benefit from the brand?*
- *What are some examples of how the brand can be used by businesses and organizations?*
- ***Design Packaging.***

Create a compelling portfolio for the brand materials. *Powered by Nature* provides a platform for a strong graphic representation. Using the provided creative material as a starting point, work with a graphic artist or agency to design packaging for the Brand Navigation materials that reflects the brand details and qualities. The brand impression and your ability to recruit brand followers will benefit from an engaging and enticing presentation portfolio.

4. The Brand Navigators as Chief Brand Marketers

The Brand Navigators is the headquarters for all things Elk River brand. As the Brand Navigators work together, challenge each other to extend the brand and identify new resources and opportunities, new ways and new channels for brand development will be implemented. However, to get you started, here are some priority marketing projects that will build the brand's capacity to influence Elk River's reputation.

- ***Launch an Elk River Brand Website.***

While not intended to replace or consolidate the public/private sector websites, this website is intended to be the "go-to" place for anyone wanting to know about or engage with the Elk River brand. This website will tell the Elk River story, explain the branding research and process, and most of all, be the place where all the brand integration materials and opportunities will be accessed.

- *Domain Name and Url: poweredbynature.org*
This website address establishes this website as the definitive source for Elk River brand creative and content. It can also be set-up to click thru to other primary websites – like the City of Elk River EDA – simultaneously.
- *Website Contents.* A simple, website template is required to serve as the repository easily managed and updated. The navigation bar will include the following tabs as portals to brand information.
 - *Brand Research.*
 - *Brand Story, Brand Positioning, Brand Platform, Tagline, Logo*
 - *Glossary of Brand Words and Phrases*
 - *Official Brand Style Guide*
 - *Brand merchandise/promotional materials*
 - *Brand News! – brand innovations, initiatives, successes, news stories*
 - *Brand Navigators/Organization*
 - *Links – all active links to organizations engaged in the business of branding Elk River.*
- *Keep Me Posted!*
Arrange a promotional tile on the Home Page which invites everyone visiting the website to sign in to receive updates; encourage comments; ask for Elk River testimonials.
- *Publish this website address.* Use this website address on the Brand Navigator business cards and in all press releases to set it apart from individual stakeholder websites and identify it as the brand headquarters. Include this website address in all Brand packages so that local business and organizations have ready access to the graphic materials, content-building materials and brand ideas and projects available.

- *Website Management and Maintenance.* The Brand News section, Links and any time-dated material will require maintenance and updating. Opt-ins, comments and testimonials must be screened and moved to databases and marketing material collection points for integration.

- ***Cultivate a Brand Network.***

The Brand Navigators will be instrumental in developing this communication tactic and economic development “best practice.” Using the tools proposed in this Plan, these well-connected and influential stakeholders can identify and recruit business and community leadership to expand the reach and impact of the brand message.

- *Tap into the energy of high profile business and community leadership.* More credible and diverse brand voices in the communication channel literally “buys” Elk River a meaningful reputation in the marketplace. These champions can call attention to what Elk River offers – and it comes from the perspective of those who are actually living or doing business in Elk River already.
- *Make it a “Club”: Elk River Powered Up.* Identify friendly, responsible, trustworthy business owners, realtors and community leaders who will join you in helping to distribute Elk River brand messaging through their company or organization banner and communication channels. It may sound scary to release control of your messaging to other organizations but it is precisely the kind of activity that, when managed and coordinated well, will help you build a solid reputation in the business community, among site selectors and the commercial real estate communities and among customers in others spheres of influence.
- *Start with Business. Community. Recreation.* Identify reliable and willing participants for each category and ask them to participate. The Chief Brand Navigator must coordinate the messaging activity centrally but “deputize” lead members in each category to help you monitor the activity.
 - Meet once a month; rotate the meeting around Elk River’s restaurants and event locations to expose these places to “club” members; ask facilities and owners to help you by offering light refreshments and appetizers or snacks and offer a tour.
 - Review the social media editorial calendar and collect and make recommendations about how they can align their social media engagement with the topics and priorities for the next month; provide them tips and talking points about featured projects or initiatives.
 - Alert the members to press releases scheduled for the month and the timing of those releases so they can coordinate their contributions.

- ***Brand Navigators as Brand Correspondents.***

Involve every Brand Navigator in the business of creating and touting brand successes. These stakeholders are out there every day and in a position to see and hear stories about the brand that need to be captured and used to further the brand's traction.

- Ask them to author briefs and short stories about how the brand is resonating in their neighborhoods, businesses and organizations.
- Ask them to collect testimonials and comments from those they encounter in business and community activity.

- ***Brand Navigators as Brand Brain Trust***

In addition to the organizational responsibilities the Brand Navigators are the "brain trust" of the Elk River brand – expected and encouraged to think about ways to embed brand language, create collaborations to expand the brand impact, extend messaging opportunities in new and refreshing ways and identify new resources and opportunities.

- *Identify a Chief Opportunity Officer.* This brand champion will drive the "brain trust" encouraging people to dig deeper and look harder; ask stakeholders to work their networks and continually explore new ideas and marketing channels for consideration.
- *Create a Protocol for Consideration.* To avoid favoring, discouraging or embarrassing stakeholders, create a simple protocol through which all new brand ideas, extensions, uses, partnerships are filtered rather than dismissing them or approving them on the spot. This assures everyone that each idea is valuable and will receive attention.
 - Identify a three (3) person Opportunity Review Crew. Keep the number uneven to avoid ties. Keep the Crew to a small number to facilitate immediate review. Make the commitment that each idea will be considered within the context of the brand objectives and Brand Navigator goals.
 - Review and report back within two weeks. Within two weeks of the idea being presented, the Crew needs to meet and report back to the Brand Navigators of their findings and recommendations.

5. Take the Lead on High Impact Brand Projects

Many brand initiatives are recommended for consideration in this Plan. But there are a few projects that can and will set the stage for a powerful brand performance. These projects also have the capacity to transcend any single organization and set the tone for how the Brand Navigators and the Elk River brand are perceived, and received, in the community. The Brand Navigators and the City should take the lead on these projects including identifying sponsors and partners, oversight, management and advocacy.

- ***"Powered by Nature" Brand Icons***

Developing a set of icons provides organizations throughout the community opportunities to tie into the Elk River brand in expected and unexpected ways – visually, architecturally, print and functional purposes.

- *Partner with the Arts Alliance.* The Arts Alliance is a logical partner to identify artists for designing and rendering graphic and artistic interpretations of the brand. Enlist them to help you plan, launch and judge a juried graphic arts competition, the purpose: to create a series of *Powered by Nature* graphic icons that can be interpreted in several dimensions. While there is room for further creative interpretation, some of the obvious icons would include:
 - Power and energy symbols: nuclear power, electricity, lightening, rivers, wind, solar, currents, recycling, composting, conservation
 - Nature symbols: pine trees, hardwood trees, rivers, currents, seasons, plants & flowers, wildlife, hills, lifestyle outdoor sports,
- *Post on Brand Navigator Website.* Make the branded icons available on the Brand Navigators website and have them available in the marketing package when making calls on companies and organizations to provide them with easy and affordable options for integration.

- ***Bring the Elk River Brand to Life in Video.***

Story-telling is done in a number of ways but none more compellingly than when words and brand promise are brought to life on film - showcasing the strength, power, abundance, energy, synergies, heart, character and beauty that defines Elk River. The video can become the centerpiece of a brand presentation, a multiple public/private sector website feature, a YouTube posting, a Facebook feature, a realtor's tool, an EDA strategy and a point of pride for elected officials, residents and community organizations.

- *Find a story-teller.* Not all videographers are created equal. Avoid the documentary approach and patching stock footage together. Elk River has a powerful story to tell and it requires a clear vision and understanding of the brand and brand promise and its roots. Work with an agency or production house that specializes in "story-telling" films or commercials. They will understand story telling concepts and help you visualize your story boards and concepts.
- *Tap into the brand character.* Tap into the inherent beauty of the contradictions implied in the Elk River brand: *Powered by Nature*. This brand allows you to play off of and juxtaposition energy with serenity in exciting and unique ways that capture the authentic, distinguishing characteristics that define Elk River; punctuate by a combination of music that underscores these unexpected characteristics alternating high energy with soft contemplative music.
<http://www.youtube.com/user/VisitOklahomaCity>
<http://www.youtube.com/user/VisitOklahomaCity#p/a/u/2/YEEi8yIWACs>

- ***Manage Brand Communications.***

Brand messaging is one of the top priorities for the Brand Navigators. A Communications Plan inclusive of online and offline internal and external brand messaging is discussed throughout this Plan with responsibility attributed to a variety of organizations. However, it is a Brand Navigator responsibility to coordinate, provide direction and bring focus to the development and integration of the communication channels.

- *Create a baseline Communications Plan.* Coordinate with Brand Navigator goals and objectives, calendars and projects so that the branded messaging is reinforced and benefiting the brand goals as well as organization and company goals.
- *Develop a Brand Navigator Social Media Plan.* This Plan will embrace a variety of public and private sector strategies and goals to create a more focused brand voice.
 - Consolidate the strength of social media. Less is more when managing brand messaging. Major players in brand marketing will be asked to coordinate their messaging to synchronize with the brand messaging to energize an overarching brand theme to influence people's perception of Elk River.
 - Start with the baseline Editorial Calendar. Use the editorial calendar to set the stage for the weekly Twitter campaign. With few exceptions, employ the Twelve Months of Elk River themes and the editorial calendar to construct and deliver a coherent and integrated Twitter dialogue with followers.
 - Set goals. Three to five new tweets a day.
- *Accept responsibility for Managing Primary Internet Sites.* Sites like Wikipedia, TripAdvisor, City Feet, Topix, City-Data.com and others are websites that surf the net for news bits and populate an "Elk River, MN." posting. The Brand Navigators will be well-served to take responsibility for these websites. Keep them current, accurate and engaging.

- ***Put the Brand to Work on Light Pole Banners.***

Light pole banners bring color, texture and energy to a cityscape. A coordinated, branded, light pole campaign concentrated in at least three areas: Downtown, major city parks and recreation areas and around City Hall will energize the brand and begin to stake a claim for Elk River's brand identity.



Using the brand logo, tagline and a nature-based color palette, create a set of branded light pole banners that reflect the character of each of the environments:

- *Downtown* – active, comfortable, fun, on the banks of the Mississippi.
- *Parks and Recreational Area* – energized, energizing, invigorating, relaxing, serene, beautiful and inspirational.
- *City Hall* – pro-active, connected, engaged, caring, focused.

- ***Put the Brand to Work with Custom Bike Racks.***

Elk River is an active, energetic community that enjoys an outdoor lifestyle and activities. The Downtown area, corporate buildings, business parks, shopping centers, City Hall and other city buildings and major parks and recreation areas can put the Elk River brand to work affordably and engagingly by employing the brand or brand promise with a custom designed bike rack.

- *It's a Statement.* Use the bike racks as an opportunity to make a statement. Encouraging a healthy lifestyle, achieving balance with the environment and supporting the desired quality of life (eliminate traffic congestion, conserve and protect natural resources) are synergistic brand messages.
- *Engage the Arts Alliance.* Engage the Arts Alliance to develop a design competition for a selection of branded bike rack interpretations. Use the brand logo and graphic icons as design templates. Encourage brand synergy with a power or nature symbol that complements the character of the company or environment: a pine tree or hill motif for Hillside Park; a backpack for Woodland Trails; a water current motif for River's Edge Commons; an ice cream cone or slice of pizza for a downtown corner; a jet ski or boat for Orono Park; an energy icon for an energy-related industry; a power symbol at the gateway to a business park.



- *Funding and Sponsorship.* Solicit quotes from custom bike rack manufacturers and prepare a rate sheet for individual public and private sector stakeholder purchase *and/or* develop a public/private sector funding project to install branded bike racks in designated areas.

- ***Put the Brand to Work on the Historic Water Tower.***

Thanks to dedicated leadership and volunteers, Elk River successfully applied for and received a grant to save and restore the Historic Water Tower. The Elk River brand is a perfect companion for this restoration project.

- *Powered by Nature.* The Elk River brand is perfectly aligned with the goal of preserving the water tower as a symbol of Elk River's strength and perseverance. Hopefully, the Brand Navigators will champion the Elk River brand as a compliment to the traditional Elk River logo so that the Tower stands as a testimonial to the past, present *and* future of Elk River.



- **Champion Gateway Signage.**

Gateway signage has been designated a priority goal for the City. And this Plan concurs with this priority. During this Community Brand process, it was observed and remarked upon, that there was no sense of arrival in Elk River and little, if any, attention to diverting traffic off the highways and into the downtown core area. This is a poor economic development and marketing strategy given Elk River's opportunities and strategic location. Gateway signage creates a good first impression, signals arrival and raises curiosity among travelers. Without compelling gateway signage, Elk River continues to risk being *"that City you drive through to get north to the lakes."*



- *Consider public/private collaboration.* Cities are seeking, and finding, innovative ways to stake a claim to their identities with gateway signage. A public/private collaboration that showcases the synergy between government and the private sector is a powerful and authentic statement for Elk River. The co-sponsoring company wins and the City wins! The design will be dominated by the City of Elk River brand but feature a framework for the company to be featured: *Home of Sportech!*

- *Make a strong statement.* Think vertical rather than horizontal. With 10,000 + cars whizzing by each day, your signage needs to stand out not blend in. Think architecturally edgy and forward-looking while incorporating natural elements and textures that define Elk River's connection to nature. Think about employing new technology that pumps up the volume of the sign with solar power elements so Elk River is "open" night and day.

- *Multiply these signs.* Duplicate these signs or partner with a number of organizations and erect signage at the major entryways to Elk River on Highways 10 and 169, approaching north and south, east and west. This makes a bold and positive statement about the quality of the relationship between the City and private companies in Elk River.

- *Establish Downtown Arrival.* The convergence of the Highways at the turn-off into Downtown Elk River must be optimized as a priority marketing and business opportunity. Seek collaboration with the State's Department of Transportation and Sherburne County to lobby for appropriate wayfinding signage that helps drivers "find" their way into Downtown Elk River.



- ***Advocate for Facility, Venue and Infrastructure Branding.***

Throughout this Plan there are simple, affordable and high profile ways proposed as synergistic links to the Elk River brand. The Brand Navigators must be the chief advocates for these branding opportunities as brand extensions that will deeply seed and nurture the brand in the public consciousness.

- *Inventory the Projects, Facilities and Venues.* Identify public or private facilities and venues that can be easily and affordably branded as a complement to the official Elk River logo or company logos. Permanent, architecturally attached signage may be a challenge until it requires replacement. But there are dozens of relatively affordable internal and external signage and branding opportunities at city parks and facilities, business parks and Downtown that can be tackled immediately.
- *Coordinate with lead organizations.* Work with the City, River's Edge Business Association and others to develop a plan, timeline and funding options to incorporate the brand into signage and streetscaping elements.



- **Champion Streetscaping in Downtown and Parks.**

Elk River has an abundance of natural amenities that contribute to an enviable quality of life. Branding park benches and attractive, eco-friendly trash containers creates a synergy between the City and residents and visitors while insinuating the Elk River brand promise into more concrete forms.



- *Inventory Opportunities.*

Inventory the opportunities and prioritize the high profile and high impact options.

- *Funding.*

Existing resources budgeted for replacement or renovation and maintenance; public/private sector partnerships among community leaders who appreciate parks and understand the value of

creating a comfortable and memorable experience for residents and visitors; identify grants and state or federal funding sources.

- *Naming Rights.* Offer naming rights to families and companies. Small plaques can remember a loved one or special event or recognize an organization or company.



- **Create and Launch an Elk River Festival.**

It is all about Elk River! Elk River already hosts a variety of arts and music events, athletic events, farmers markets and robust recreational activities. What's missing is a signature festival that celebrates the Elk River character and invites Minnesota to visit, explore and enjoy – and become familiar with why Elk River is the best place to live and do business!

- ***Elk River Powered UP.*** A working title that captures the combination of strengths inherent in the brand and identifies the proposed character of the festival: Juxtapositioning the duality of power, energy and lifestyle with the natural abundance, preservation and appreciation for natural resources and local products.

- *Lifestyle, Adventure and Athletic Events.* Plan an Elk River Triad mountain biking, hiking/walking and swimming event planned to showcase Hillside, Woodlands and Orono Lake.



- *Local Agriculture, Food and Products.* Feature organizations, farms, local chefs and cooks, home cooks and locally produced food and beverage products; launch competitions in themed food categories: power breakfasts, power lunches, power bars, energy drinks and snacks; healthy eating and lifestyle programs, projects, cooking; home gardening exhibitions; farm to table cookery.
- *Energy, Power and the Environment.* Preservation, recycling, Project Conserve, High Five Pack programs; composting and organic waste disposal; demonstrations, hands-on experiences; business and community organization displays and exhibits; public/private collaborations.
- *Music and the Arts.* Local rock and country bands, classical, folk and new age music; local adult and children's talent competition; local crafts and arts – jewelry, clothing, accessories; painting, drawing, performance art, sculpture and metal work.

- **Develop a line of Elk River brand merchandise.**

Branded merchandise generates “buzz” and keeps the brand top-of-mind among Brand Navigators, Task Forces, Stakeholder groups and community and business organizations. In addition to serving as “brand messengers”, these items can be used as gifts to partners and sponsors, sold at events and festivals, merchandised in stores and sold on websites.

A larger, starter list of branded merchandise is provided in **Preparing to Tell the Elk River Story** section of this Plan. However, a few items are recommended here for their functionality and effectiveness.

- *Consider Eco-Friendly Products.* Given Elk River’s growing reputation and brand, seeking out and investing in eco-friendly products is a brand affinity.



6. Identify Brand Funding & Resources

The brand development process is the first step in successfully branding a community. The Elk River brand must now be launched and sustained. This requires dedicated funding and resources.

- ***Deploy existing resources.***

The first and obvious recourse for funding the brand launch and implementation is to identify those public and private sector resources that are already designated for internal or external marketing. These resources will most likely be identified with the City, the Chamber, the Economic Development Authority and major private sector companies in Elk River.

- *Develop a Budget.* Use the Implementation Plan to prioritize overall brand implementation and then to support specific projects.
- *Commit to Mutual Benefit.* The brand launch and implementation can be employed to mutual benefit. This point must be made so that resources reallocated to support the Elk River brand will be seen as still supporting individual organizational marketing objectives.

- ***Explore new resources.***

Throughout the process of assembling and building the Elk River Brand Navigators, Stakeholder Groups and the Community Coalition, identify funding and in-kind resources that can be dedicated to seeding the community brand.

- ***Organize funding.***

Consider a funding campaign that links investment to a specific strategy and tactic as well as soliciting general investment to support the launch and maintenance of the full-scope of work. Some organizations and corporations may enjoy, or feel more attached to, one part of the brand program than another.

- *Generate and allocate resources for first twelve (12) months.* This funding will support brand development projects and organization, brand launch and internal marketing materials and those priority tactics identified in the Plan. Hopefully, this first wave of brand funding will be consolidated from among the prime marketing organizations for Elk River: the City, the EDA, the Chamber, realtors and major companies and industries invested in Elk River and the Elk River brand.
 - Brand development and organization
 - Brand launch materials
 - Internal marketing and promotional materials
 - Website design, marketing and maintenance
 - Community brand building

- *Develop a Brand Strategy Campaign.* This approach allows the Brand Navigators to appeal to smaller organizations, small to mid-size companies and individuals by providing them specific options to which they would like to attach their investment or contribution. This funding can be set-up as one-time giving or as sustaining on a monthly or yearly basis.
- ***Plan for Next Stages.***
After launch and the first year of brand implementation, specific brand projects are required to sustain and grow the strength and influence of the brand.
 - Mid-Range Planning: 12–18 months
 - Long-Range Planning: 18-24 months
- ***Plan for Brand Extension.***
Identify potential additional funding needed to broaden the scope of the brand impact.
 - Community projects: festivals and events
 - Capital projects: signage, infrastructure
 - Expanded regional advertising and marketing.
- ***Beyond the Task Force.***
Hopefully, the task of identifying funding sources and resources will be tackled with enthusiasm by the Elk River Brand Navigators Task Force. Among potential resources are:
 - Matching public/private funding plans
 - Minnesota State grant sources
 - United States Government grant sources including Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration, Preserve America
 - Grant Station: organized by functional category, this membership database source identifies public and private grant sources and opportunities that are a good fit for Elk River initiatives including: environmental, energy, education, recreation, preservation, renovation and community building.
 - Corporate grants: local, state and regional

7. Sustain the Brand Culture & Momentum.

Accept responsibility for being the “Brand Inspiration Leadership”. No organization, person or collection of businesses will be as devoted and dedicated to the brand and its integrity as the Elk River Brand Navigators - the brand success rests in your hands.

- **Continually charge and re-charge the brand batteries.**

Launch a formal evaluation at the six month, one year, 18 month and two year marks and then every year afterwards. Benchmarks should include:

- Implementation progress as measured against the Plan implementation timeline, strategies and tactics
- Brand integration as measured by internal and community brand adoption, use and integration
- Brand exposure as measured by press coverage, editorial and social media play
- Brand effectiveness as measured by community survey, business leadership survey and economic development and tourism acceptance among site selectors and visitors.

- **Use incentives to recognize and engage.**

People will always do the right thing if the cause is important to them. But people still like being recognized for their contributions. So, don't overlook the powerful opportunity to recognize those who championed the brand and made it real for Elk River.

- *Create the Elk River Compass award.* This Elk River-branded, compass-themed award will be given to a person or organization each year who has contributed most effectively to the brand launch, integration or extension with new brand ideas, networks, collaborations or brand culture.



- *Create the Elk River Navigator award.* branded, navigation-themed award will be given to a person or organization who contributed talent or resources to the brand planning, execution or project management.

This Elk River-
be given to a
the most time,
organization,

- These awards can be made quarterly for the first year of the brand implementation to generate excitement and maintain engagement and then annually thereafter.
- These awards can be crafted with the Elk River brand and a compass or navigation tool as a signature in acrylic, wood or metal.

II. Prepare to Tell the Elk River Story

This is your story. Elk River's story. It is a powerful story that must be told over and over again in small and large ways until it takes root in people's consciousness. Until it becomes second nature – a way of doing business, a way of describing where you are from, a way of living. Ultimately, this brand story-telling defines Elk River and Elk River's reputation.

Start by recognizing and understanding that an authentic community brand is NOT just a graphic representation of a logo or a tagline or a slogan. It is about powerful words and phrases that accurately capture the character of a community. It is about connecting the "energy" of Elk River with the people, places and things that generate that energy. It is about connecting the "nature" with both the character of its people and businesses and the natural abundance and beauty of Elk River. It is about connecting the "passions" of the people to make their community special and make a difference. It is about the "power" the people and organizations bring to their aspirations and the natural energy that powers their lifestyle.

Strategy: To provide Elk River brand stakeholders the platform and tools to tell the Elk River story with compelling messaging and imagery that effectively describes the value and purpose of the brand as an expression of their true identity and nature.

Tactics

1. Get Elk River Insiders Aboard First.

Gaining the commitment and support of primary stakeholders and influencers for the Elk River brand is a critically important first step in branding a community. Before rolling out the brand to the community at large, the Brand Navigators must first understand and learn how to effectively articulate the brand's core values, its essence and driving force. Brand Navigators must learn to express the premise of the brand with conviction. This is the foundation for a seamless and effective brand launch that will take seed and flourish.

- **Communicate with passion, purpose and precision.**

The Elk River brand is rooted in truth. Therefore, using the brand promise words and phrases and saying them over and over again begins the process of making it so in the minds of those residing in and outside the city limits. Translating the brand into the tapestry of life and business in Elk River reinforces that truth. Elk River can build the reputation they want and deserve by remembering the value of communicating with passion, purpose and precision.

- *Consistency.* This asks the Elk River Navigators and all its partners to understand and practice the power of consistent, branded messaging to reinforce the positive words, phrases and imagery that clearly defines and differentiates Elk River from its competitors. You will need to remind others that while the brand may be familiar to them, there are millions of people with whom it has yet to register.
- *Relevance.* This asks the Brand Navigators to understand that organizing and communicating their messages in ways that are relevant to particular audiences will improve their image, demonstrate an understanding of what the different audiences value, want and need and grow the City's respect and traction among these audiences.
- *Action.* Action does speak louder than words. This asks the Brand Navigators to respect the value of action, as well as words. That integrating the brand is part of the equation – making the brand come to life in daily actions and community decisions is the other part of the equation.
- ***Tap the Power of the Brand Navigators.***
The primary brand drivers – those with the most invested in the brand development and the success of the brand – must be the first to embrace, understand and rally behind the brand.
 - *Plan an Elk River Navigators Brand Roll-Out.* Conducted and facilitated by ChandlerThinks, this 2 ½ hour meeting is intended to present the Brand Plan (referred to as the Brand Navigator) to the Elk River Brand Committee (referred to as *Elk River Brand Navigators*). These are the people who are involved and invested in the brand committee, the primary and official brand drivers who are charged with, and accept responsibility for, overseeing and managing the Elk River brand and embracing the brand to further economic development, city identity and marketing and public/private collaboration.
 - *Make Elk River Brand Champions.* Making brand champions of the Brand Navigators requires information and commitment but also energy and engagement.
 - Make it memorable. Make this roll-out meeting memorable, fun and high energy. Arrange for the meeting to be held in an inspiring location; fun food and beverages depending upon the time of day the meeting is planned; request that key leadership make opening comments and issue a "Call to Action"; prepare and distribute an Elk River Brand "How To" and a gift/giveaway. We want everyone to remember how good they felt, how proud they are and how exciting this is for Elk River.
 - *Ask for Testimonials.* Ask for Testimonials. Provide each person in attendance with a *My Elk River* postcard when they arrive. As the meeting concludes, ask

each Elk River Brand Navigator to weigh in with their support for the brand in their own words: *what they like about it; how it reflects Elk River; ways they can see the brand working to help Elk River grow and prosper.*

- Use these ideas and testimonials from local community and business leadership to add authenticity to the brand. Sprinkle these quotes throughout your brand website, brand launch materials, brand invitation and brand launch event.
- *Discuss Community Brand Launch Platform.* Some time will be devoted to working with the Brand Navigators to facilitate and inspire identification of the most effective, official brand launch event and/or process reflecting the specific dynamics and character of Elk River. While a community-wide brand launch is not always necessary or advised, if Elk River wishes to plan and execute such an event, suggestions for an official launch will be shared.
- ***Tap the Power of Community Influencers.***

Throughout the brand development, the brand process has touched dozens of people who were either interviewed or attended and participated in focus groups. Your next stop in effectively rolling out this brand is to inform and re-engage this group of influencers who contributed their time and perspective.

 - *Plan a Brand Roll-Out Meeting.* Not to be confused with an official Community-Wide Brand Celebration, this meeting is intended to inform, re-engage and equip those who were part of the brand development. The Brand Roll-Out will be less detailed than that provided to the Elk River Brand Navigators but just as important in that it will equip them to explain and support the brand with the fundamental rationale, creative and primary strategies recommended for effective brand implementation.
 - *Capitalize on the Talent in the Room.* At several places throughout the presentation, we want to tap into their talent, experience and perspective for how best to move the Elk River brand forward. Their ideas will be collected and presented to the Elk River Brand Navigators for consideration.
 - *Ask for Testimonials.* Provide each person in attendance with an *I am energized by Elk River!* postcard when they arrive. As the meeting concludes, ask each participant to provide a testimonial about how they relate to the message of the brand; how the words reflect Elk River; ways they can recommend for connecting the brand to living and working in Elk River.
 - Use these ideas and testimonials to add authenticity to the brand from local community and business leadership and residents. Sprinkle these quotes throughout your collective websites and brand marketing materials and programs.

- ***Train the Trainers!***

Multiply your brand work force and capacity by training those who will most likely be charged with incorporating the Elk River brand into their public or private sector work. This multiplies the brand impact to help the Elk River Brand Navigators launch and sustain an external marketing campaign.

- *Plan a Trainer Brand Workshop.* This is a roll-up-your-sleeves working session. Public and private organizations associated with the Elk River Brand Navigators are encouraged to attend or send a marketing representative.
 - Led by a brand implementation expert, this workshop will provide people and organizations with the tools they need to explain, advocate for, interpret and integrate the brand strategies and tactics into their work and that of the community to achieve optimal community traction. This sets the stage for a more comprehensive and powerful external marketing campaign.

- ***Tap the Power of the City Hall Brand Culture.***

When a City Hall has been as integrally engaged in the branding development as has the City of Elk River, the brand roll-out takes on another dimension – and opportunity. Before taking the brand to a Community-Wide brand launch, invest some time and effort into sharing the brand vision with those who can be critical in its community acceptance and vitality – the city employees.

- *Start at the Top.* Get all your Elected Officials aboard. Use the Community Brand Communications Package to roll-out the Elk River brand one-on-one with the Mayor and each Council member. This personal approach will allow a better exchange, time for questions and the ability to address specific issues.
 - This roll-out should be conducted by Elk River Brand Navigators with whom the elected official has a working relationship.
 - Leave behind brand materials and gift/giveaway.
 - Request their commitment in a “Call to Action”.
- *Build Brand Loyalty Among Department Heads.* The Elk River brand is an obvious opportunity for Department Heads to re-engage with employees, stoke employee pride, build consensus for a common communications and customer experience platform and re-energize employees about their City again.
- *Schedule a Department Head Meeting dedicated to the Elk River Brand.* This is an important and critical step for integrating the Elk River brand into the heart and soul of Elk River’s City Hall and customer culture. Just as with the Elected Officials and other brand roll-out meetings, make it informative, keep it relevant but make it exciting and fun.

- *Engage the Employees.* The City employees are the face of Elk River, and therefore, the face of the Elk River brand. Give every city employee the opportunity to see, touch, feel and interact with the Elk River brand at the earliest opportunity after the Elk River Brand Navigators and Elected Officials and Department Heads are aboard.
- *All Employee Brand Day.* How about planning and implementing an Elk River All Employee Brand Day! Really engage City employees in the brand launch and make them “brand gardeners” by bringing them in at the ground level.
 - Start with an all-employees meeting and brand roll-out for one hour; host a brown bag, branded lunch for everyone with Department Heads available to answer questions and jot down ideas.
 - Initiate a Brand Idea Faire – a box or e-mail address to which new brand ideas can be made and sent; giveaways, contests.
 - Distribute Brand Messaging kits for branding inter-departmentally.

2. Conduct a Communications Audit.

Telling the Elk River story is easier when the power of the Elk River brand and its compelling messaging is coupled with a Checklist of Communication Touchpoints. Given the number of businesses and organizations engaged in the Elk River branding process and implementation, using this checklist to identify all your “story-telling” channels and vehicles is a convenient way to coordinate and optimize your resources.

- ***Communication Touch Points***

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employees | <input type="checkbox"/> Mailing Lists |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone | <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing & Advertising |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Services | <input type="checkbox"/> Sales Promotions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Web Sites | <input type="checkbox"/> Networking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Website Links | <input type="checkbox"/> Direct Mail |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Voice Mails | <input type="checkbox"/> Trade Shows |
| <input type="checkbox"/> E-Mails | <input type="checkbox"/> Exhibits |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Word of Mouth | <input type="checkbox"/> Maps |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stationary Package | <input type="checkbox"/> Presentations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Publications | <input type="checkbox"/> Vehicles |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Packaging | <input type="checkbox"/> Billboards |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Signage | <input type="checkbox"/> Posters/Banners |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Forms | <input type="checkbox"/> Buttons/Pins |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletters | <input type="checkbox"/> Clings/Decals/Magnets |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Products | <input type="checkbox"/> Gifts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proposals | <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing Partner |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Customer Experiences | <input type="checkbox"/> Resources |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environment | <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public Relations | <input type="checkbox"/> Facilities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public Affairs | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social Media | |

3. Elk River Branded Merchandise Spreads the Word.

Branded merchandise is one of the most reliable and prolific forms of branding because it leverages the willingness and mobility of people to spread the brand in high profile, functional, fun but unobtrusive ways. Whether it is a branded coffee mug sitting on a conference table, a local resident wearing a t-shirt when traveling or a boater using a branded floating keychain, the Elk River message is delivered.

- ***Develop connected merchandising opportunities.***

Merchandise recommended in this category reflects the branded lifestyle of Elk River. Such merchandise can further solidify a community brand by association. These items can be adopted by organizations and installed at public recreational parks and sites, purchased as gifts or used as promotional giveaways and/or offered for sale online and at designated locations throughout Elk River.

- *"Lifestyle" items that "speak" Elk River brand.* The brand lends itself to interpretation consistent with the lifestyle and natural assets of Elk River. Given the nature and character of the Elk River brand, consider eco-friendly branded merchandise to create synergy with your actions and goals.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ball Caps | <input type="checkbox"/> Trail Mix |
| <input type="checkbox"/> T-Shirts | <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy Snack Food |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Boat Floats | <input type="checkbox"/> Sun Glasses |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Float Rafts | <input type="checkbox"/> Picnic Baskets |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ski Gear and Accessories | <input type="checkbox"/> Tote Bags |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mountain Bike Gear | <input type="checkbox"/> Flashlights |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sun Visors | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp Chairs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sun Hats | <input type="checkbox"/> Compass |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sun Tan Lotions | <input type="checkbox"/> Coolers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Water Bottles | <input type="checkbox"/> Sweat Shirts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cold Packs | <input type="checkbox"/> Sweat Bands |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Soft Lunch Packs | <input type="checkbox"/> Jackets |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Back Packs | <input type="checkbox"/> Knit Hats |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drawstring Back Packs | <input type="checkbox"/> Vests |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beer/Soda Bottle and Can Cuffs | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor Survival Tools |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seed Packets | <input type="checkbox"/> Bicycle Accessories |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Energy Drinks | <input type="checkbox"/> Recycling Bags/Containers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Power Bars | <input type="checkbox"/> Trash Disposal Bags |

- *Business Items*

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Polo shirts | <input type="checkbox"/> Post Its |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business shirts and blouses | <input type="checkbox"/> Pens |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calendars | <input type="checkbox"/> Mouse Pads |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paperweights | <input type="checkbox"/> Flash Drives |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paper Cubes | <input type="checkbox"/> Lap Top Accessories |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Desk Coasters |

- ☐ Executive Toys
- ☐ Mugs
- ☐ Glassware
- ☐ Reusable Water Bottles

- ☐ Picture Frames
- ☐ Journals
- ☐ Notebooks

- **Search out “cottage industries”.**

With help from family and friends, the Elk River Star News and community newsletters and organizations, identify family enterprises or “cottage industries” where food products (jams, jellies, baked goods, condiments, meats, dried foods, spices, granola bars, trail mix, coffee, tea and snacks) or decorative items (ornaments, garden fixtures, journals, recipe books, hand-made linens) indigenous to Elk River are being made and sold.

- *Co-brand.* Consider proposing a co-branding initiative if the food products can be manufactured reliably; feature branded products in gifts, gift baskets, online websites, social media campaigns, public relations and tradeshow promotions.
- *Re- Brand food items.* Consider creating custom bands or sleeves to slide over jars, boxes, bottles, bars and food products that have a clear affinity with the Elk River brand: Power Bars and Energy Drinks.
- *Brand specialty items.* Enlist local ice cream shop, coffee shop and pizza place owners to brand a food item.
 - *Chocolate Hillside* – a special chocolate ice cream recipe that salutes the mountain biking and terrain of Hillside Park.
 - *Energy Ecstasy* – a high octane coffee bean mixture that complements the power and energy themes.
 - *Power Pump* – a smoothie infused with natural energy supplements that complement the lifestyle theme.

4. Community Brand Launch

Elk River may choose to celebrate the Elk River brand and brand promise with a community-wide roll-out. While we generally do not recommend community roll-outs as being necessary to effectively adopting, launching and employing a community brand, this decision is at the discretion of the Brand Navigators. It is far more important to the integrity and sustainability of the community brand that the City's elected officials and staff, the Brand Navigators and other key stakeholders and community influencers be persuaded to the brand's core truths and powerful platform. With this achieved, this Plan provides a great variety of opportunities for Elk River to engage the residents through their stories, testimonials and actions – integrating the brand into their lives in meaningful ways that resonate.

- ***Creating and Planning a Community Celebration.***

If the Brand Navigators believe that a community brand launch is desirable, the brand consultants will work with them to help identify the most effective community brand launch strategy. But ultimately, this event and its intrinsic characteristics must reflect ownership of the brand and embody the spirit and energy of Elk River.

- *Theme:* Must reflect the brand platform and promise – the connection and synergy between energy, nature, inspiration, heart, power and making a difference.
- *Location:* The selection of a location will help you deliver on the brand and the theme. If the event is planned for spring, summer or fall, consider the River's Edge Commons as a dynamic and energizing venue or Handke Park "The Pit" for its multi-generational appeal. These are natural community gathering places that reflect the character and core values of Elk River, and thereby capture the essence of the Elk River brand. If planned for the winter months or weather is a concern, the Elk River Ice Arena will provide an equally comfortable and familiar venue for the community.
- *Invitation:* The invitation will reflect the essence of the brand with key messaging points. A "come one, come all" approach is symbolic of how Elk River feels about itself.
- *Program:* Again, the program needs to reflect the core values and brand truths. Light on protocol and formality and heavy on pageantry and fun, the brand can be rolled out in some very exciting ways:
 - Parade of groups arriving at the event in formation - skateboarders, mountain bikers, hikers, walkers, physical fitness classes, high school sports teams, joggers and runners; energy industry representatives and workers in formation; volunteer groups; city staff engaged in Parks & Recreation, Utilities, Recycling and Energy programs; environmental service groups (DIRTWIRX); community service organizations; religious organizations; Arts Alliance with students, parents, players and artists –

all arriving in formations with branded signage declaring their role and place in Elk River.

- This convergence of people and interests replicates the convergence of the Mississippi and Elk Rivers as a source of power and recreation. Everything reflects the connection between “energy” and Elk River’s “nature.”
- *Drawings for Prizes:* Drawings are big incentives. The more prizes and the bigger the prizes, the more attendance and anticipation the event will attract. Ask local retailers and product manufacturers to contribute big prizes that are compatible with the brand: lifestyle and sports vehicles, accessories – bicycles, jet skis, hiking boots, GPS systems; dining, coffee gift cards; store coupons; gift baskets featuring Elk River products; coupons for Farmer’s Markets; credit vouchers for utility bills.
- *Give everyone a “take-away.”* Consider a branded memento – refrigerator magnet with inspirational theme; Frisbee with tagline; tote bag for grocery shopping; recycle pails for compost materials or seed packets for family gardens.

5. Make the Brand Real for Elk River Residents.

The brand must resonate with Elk River residents. Everyone must find the brand accessible and relatable because everyone in Elk River must “sell” Elk River. And they must “sell” it authentically and with conviction. Concurrent with the community brand roll-out, or as a stand-alone marketing strategy, employ existing resources to communicate with the residents about the brand and its connection to them.

- *Tap the Elk River Star News.* Ask the editor/publisher to develop a feature story or special magazine section devoted to the brand development process, the Brand Navigators, the value of the brand, its connection to the residents and businesses in Elk River and its value in positioning Elk River to others outside the area. This story must be in-depth and thorough because it will likely be one of the few opportunities the Brand Navigators will have to explain and champion the brand in such a public forum.
- *Tap Facebook.* Post the brand story on the Brand Navigator’s Facebook page and encourage people to weigh in by asking specific questions:
 - *This brand defines the energy, passion and inspirations that reflect the character of the people who live and work in Elk River. In what ways do you find energy, passion and inspiration in Elk River?*
 - *In your opinion, what person or organization in Elk River best epitomizes these characteristics?*
- *Set up a Facebook testimonial outlet.* Encourage Facebook followers to add their personal stories, anecdotes and testimonials about Elk River to create a rich stream of narrative.
 - Ask all contributors for permission to use their quotes in marketing materials promoting Elk River as a place to live, work, start a business or visit.
- *Tap City Resources.* Keep the brand messaging real and relatable with monthly messaging through City communication channels: utility bill statements, Channel 12, *Currents* newsletter (discussed in City section).
 - Utility Bills are a great opportunity to connect the brand with customers. Use a *Powered by Nature Tip of the Month* or create twelve brand-oriented Trivia Questions for which correct answers are entered into a monthly drawing for a 5% reduced utility bill next month or branded merchandise (recycle bags, containers, re-usable shopping bags).

III. The Brand as Marketing Platform

The Elk River brand is only as strong, powerful and effective as its partners, residents and government decide it will be. If the City of Elk River wants to build and seed a reputation they can depend upon to help them compete more effectively, they must rally their public and private resources to a greater common purpose. Collectively, the public and private sector must cultivate and nurture the brand synergy that is at the core of the Elk River identity. This means that the City of Elk River, the Economic Development Authority, the Elk River Chamber of Commerce, the River's Edge Business Association and Elk River's private sector partners – corporations, community leadership and community organizations - must work together to tell Elk River's story consistently and compellingly.

Equally important to effective and successful brand management is to recognize that external marketing without the support of public *and* private sector advocates, good governance and a customer-centric delivery system will be a flawed strategy. Likewise, internal marketing without the support of a well-executed external marketing campaign, cooperation and an appealing environment will be a flawed strategy.

The Elk River brand provides a powerful foundation for resourcefully combining the strengths of both an internal and external community brand marketing initiative.

Strategy: *To deploy the Elk River brand as an expression of Elk River's unique and distinctive characteristics and identity as a means to build and sustain an effective competitive reputation.*

Tactics

1. The Marketing Mix.

Everyone engaged in branding, positioning, marketing and promoting the City of Elk River must reckon with the facts: no one strategy or department or organization can single-handedly make a City's reputation. Marketing a city requires a multi-organization and multi-channel commitment. This graphic below illustrates the inter-related spheres of influence, stakeholders, interests, factors, variables and touchpoints the Brand Navigators and the City will need to manage to achieve internal and external brand traction.

- ***Notice that the categories are given equal weight in the graphic.*** This confirms the marketing imperative: a consistently managed, integrated and highly synergistic marketing platform will advance the brand objectives sooner and sustain them longer.

- **Notice that each category is dependent on public and private sector political will and determination.** Both the public and private sector components of this Marketing Mix require leadership and long-term commitment.
- **Notice the balance between internal and external variables.** External and internal factors are given equal weight when building reputation.



2. Put Communication Touchpoints to Work.

The Communication Touchpoints provides the Elk River Brand Navigators with an almost infinite variety of ways that individuals and organizations can adopt and extend the brand into their lifestyles and business operations and culture. While many of these will be explored and developed specifically for the City, Economic Development and the Community, these universal tactics are intended to help Elk River focus on the small, medium and large customer interactions that make the difference between a brand floating superficially around a community or becoming the identity of the community.

- **Customer Experience.**

You never know who is going to walk into your office or store! It may be someone looking for a place to live or start a business. So, everyone needs to be "branded." Front line employees from law offices to metal fabricators to retail stores can all be briefed on the Elk River brand so they are empowered to promote Elk River in word and action.

- *Make it easy for employers to coach their employees.* Create an *I am energized by ELK RIVER!* "contract." A postcard-sized Brand Contract which reminds people about their role in creating and sustaining the power of their words and actions to influence perceptions of Elk River.
 - *Contract:*
Front – Elk River imagery with the single, stylized line: *I am energized by Elk River!*

Back – *Elk River and (name of company) are energized and powered by me and the spirit and character I bring to my work each day. I pledge to "energize" my work to deliver an inspired customer experience that reflects my nature and that of my company and my city every day.*
- *Incorporate key words and phrases.* The brand promise contains key words and phrases which can be interpreted in compatible ways with every business, industry or service. *Energized by nature. Inspired to make a difference. Inspired by nature. Powered by passion.* All are phrases that can be adopted to connect individual business enterprise and activity with the Elk River brand message.

- **Brand Web Sites.**

Ask businesses and organizations located in Elk River to incorporate the Elk River brand and selected words and phrases from the brand promise on their Home Page to indicate their support of and belief in the Elk River brand promise. This will extend the brand's messaging capabilities.

- ***Multiply Website Links.***

Ask businesses and organizations located in Elk River to link with the primary Elk River Brand websites. This will reinforce the perceived and real connectedness among community businesses and aide in internet searches.

- ***Snipe Packaging.***

Whenever a package leaves Elk River, it becomes an "image export". Ask companies and organizations packaging products or information to customers to "snipe" their packages with an Elk River decal or stamp: *Powered by Nature.*



Roll Labels

- ***Customize Signage, Mats and Posters/Banners.***

Ask business owners and organizations to add the Elk River brand to new signage, purchase a branded entry mat or simply adopt words and phrases that support the Elk River brand. The brand will likely complement most company and organization themes and purpose.

- ***Snipe Business Forms, Stationary.***

Just like a medical center, law office or organization includes a state or national association affiliation on their hard copy and electronic stationary package, ask owners and CEOs to add the Elk River brand to their package signaling their pride and connection to the community.

- ***Optimize Publications, Newsletters, Direct Mail, E-Mails, and Promotions.***

Whether producing an Annual Report, sending out a monthly newsletter, delivering a direct mail campaign by mail or e-mail blast or launching a promotion – ask businesses to tag each with the Elk River brand logo. This will establish millions of exposures for the Elk River brand with little or no expense and again, reinforce the community connectedness and spirit.

- ***Piggy Back on Public Relations and Public Affairs Events and Activities.***

Every business and organization is engaged in some form of public relations to promote or raise awareness of their activities or business. Ask everyone to include the Elk River brand and tagline either in the body copy, if appropriate, or as a "proud supporter of..." at the end. Again, easy and free brand extension that serves mutual interests.

- **Get Social.**

Social Media, Networking, Word of Mouth are all common communication channels employed by the private sector and non-profit organizations. Ask these organizations to incorporate Elk River brand messaging into their social media plans and communications including business meetings and dialogue.

- **Re-brand Products.**

With cuffs, band-wraps, stickers or sleeves you can re-brand a variety of affinity products that helps deliver the Elk River message in fun and unique ways. Some obvious examples are: Elk River Power Bars, Elk River Energy Drinks, Elk River Trail Mix, Energy Snacks.



- **Enhance Marketing & Advertising.**

Every organization and business has a marketing and advertising plan into which the Elk River brand can be incorporated in small and large ways. Ask everyone to review their Plans and identify the best ways to easily wrap the Elk River brand within their marketing and advertising.

- **Piggy Back on Company or Organization Presence at Trade Shows.**

Exhibits and on-site tradeshow promotions and promotional materials are simple and effective means of extending the Elk River brand. Ask supporting companies and organizations to include the brand on their exhibit materials.

- **Snipe Billboards.**

Elk River companies using billboards can easily and affordably snipe the boards with the Elk River brand which will connect and increase exposures for these companies and the Elk River brand messaging.

- **Frame the Brand at Facilities.**

Elk River has a number of public facilities (City Hall, Chamber/CVB offices, Ice Arena, Parks) and private facilities with which they have relationships that offer high profile opportunities to introduce the brand and/or brand messaging to support Elk River. This can be achieved with synergistic, three dimensional interpretations of the brand, posters, window clings, electronic messaging or displays.

3. The Website as #1 Marketing Tool

The brand promise is a powerful marketing tool. The whole spectrum of marketing strategies – communication vehicles, public relations, websites, social media, online and offline advertising – are available and ready to be tapped in affordable and resourceful ways to establish the brand as Elk River's reputation.

There are several primary organizations to which internal and external visitors will turn for information about Elk River and hundreds of collateral organization channels that can be tapped to extend the brand's resonance and traction. As a consequence, this Brand Plan will first tackle the best practices and "universals" of an effective marketing initiative. These best practices should be applied to every organization engaged with the Elk River brand – from the Brand Navigators to the City to the Chamber and to the hundreds of businesses and organizations that will play a role in building Elk River's reputation.

- ***Build Synergy Among the City's Chief Marketing Websites.***

The Elk River Brand Navigator's website, the City of Elk River website, the Economic Development Authority website, the Chamber website and all other subsidiary websites associated with the image and reputation of Elk River must perform in concert to support and reinforce specific imagery and messaging. You never know what portal will be used by site selectors, potential residents, business start-ups or relocating businesses so all must be branded and optimized. Imbedding brand messaging in content on Home Pages will reinforce the synergy among websites. The stronger and more connected and supporting each website "feels" of the Elk River brand - the greater the consistent repetition of its messaging - the more powerful the impression and the more likely Elk River's reputation will shine.

- *The Elk River Brand Navigators as Coordinators.* Representing a cross-section of public and private organizations and many interests, the Brand Navigators are perfectly positioned to review and make recommendations about how best organizations and businesses can intersect with and support the brand in mutually beneficial ways. Appoint an Elk River Website Development Task Force. Identify the website experts or those familiar with branding and marketing among the Brand Navigators. Ask them to accept responsibility for advocating for and implementing the recommendations in this Plan and coordinate the brand integration into each of these websites.
- *Work Collaboratively.* The appointed Development Task Force members will be assigned to serve as liaisons with the appropriate Directors in the City, Chamber, EDA and other identified organizations. Their responsibilities will include:
 - Make recommendations for branding and messaging enhancements.
 - Provide logistical or professional expertise and support during planning and development.
 - Identify and share opportunities for cross-pollination between websites.

- *Share and Compare.* Meet regularly, weekly updates by e-mail communication and once monthly in-person to share progress and compare notes on brand integration. These monthly meetings can also be used to discuss challenges and identify solutions as well as considering new opportunities.

- **Empower the Websites**

The Internet and Websites rule! Over 85% of Americans use the internet as their #1 search tool for information, planning and assistance in decision-making. Focusing on developing these websites as your primary marketing tool is the smartest and most cost-effective marketing strategy you will employ. These websites, if created and managed well, will greatly improve Elk River's perception and positioning and increase each organization's capacity to influence decision-makers – inside and outside the City. The introduction of the Elk River brand is the perfect opportunity to bring your collective websites into alignment with your identity and goals.

- ***Think 24/7, 365 day Elk River "billboard".*** Each website is a vitally important piece of Elk River's identity and brand. Today, the website is your 24/7 billboard – open for business 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year and the first stop for local, regional, state, national and international audiences – these websites are the #1 search tool for people seeking information about Elk River. Integrating brand elements and messaging into each website reinforces the Elk River's brand promise in ways that cannot be achieved with any other form of expensive advertising.
- *Employ Best Practices for Websites.* While each organization's website will be evaluated and specific recommendations made for branding and improving, enhancing and increasing their competitive effectiveness, there are some basic "best practices" recommended for adoption by the Brand Navigators and organization leadership.
 - Make a commitment to adopt the website as your primary marketing tool. This implies that staff and time devoted to the development and maintenance of robust and brand-infused organizational websites is not just a brand imperative – it is good business!
 - Identify website management. One person (or contracted company) must be ultimately responsible for the website! Without this commitment and designation, websites languish or in the case of multiple access, the website too easily becomes a hodge-podge of information and messaging.
 - Assign specific, skilled staff members to oversee and manage each of the website's maintenance, content development and imagery in each organization. These tasks require different skill sets.

- Agree upon and establish a schedule for updates, refreshing content and contributing news and stories to keep the website real-time and relevant.

Frequency	Action
Daily	Update blogs and social media
Weekly	Review and update news and events
Weekly	Update or confirm updates on property/company data
Monthly	Update or add case studies, testimonials or success stories
Bi-Annually	Review and update overall site content (add new Census Data, change demographics, workforce data, education data or map overlays as needed)

- *Coordinate.* Identify a point of contact in each organization responsible for sharing, collaborating and coordinating website news, stories, data and information for inclusion on multiple websites. This reinforces the brand, the relevancy and connectedness of the community and its actions.
- ***Employ the Six "E's of Effective Website Design.***
Website designers and customers around the country agree that effective and memorable websites adopt the six "E"s in their website construction and maintenance. While these will be addressed and customized for each website, highlighting them here will remind the Brand Navigators of these rules: *Engage, Educate, Exact, Entertain, Enterprise and Easy.*
- ***Put the Six "E's" to Work.***
The Elk River brand provides you with the creative and interpretive tools you need to take control of the Elk River identity and reputation rather than leaving it to website visitors to draw their own conclusions from links, raw data and a smattering of information. Remember: community branding is all about telling the Elk River story.
 - *Engage* – When you make the decision to create an "engaging" website, you are making the decision to tell the Elk River story in a way that is memorable and interesting. Use the brand to infuse the Home Page and the landing pages with the distinctive "brand voice" and messaging that describes the unique Elk River. From the home page statement through the landing pages, welcome, introduce and encourage your website visitors to get to know you. Use the website as an opportunity to share your values which will tell them what they can expect. Tell them why Elk River is a great place to live, work, play and visit.

- *Educate* – Once visitors arrive at your website you have an opportunity to make the case for Elk River in terms and values that will resonate with customers. The brand will help you frame your distinguishing characteristics, answer important questions and set the stage to easily educate them about Elk River – business culture, workforce profiles, incentives, neighborhood characteristics, schools, industry profiles and clusters, transportation and accessibility, assets, tax rates, comparison to competitors, services, lifestyle amenities, activities, natural resources and the people.
- *Exact* – The reliability and accuracy of website content is paramount to Elk River’s reputation. Static websites are fatal in an age of social media. When viewed through the lens of a website visitor seeking information, if the content is not accurate - coupons have expired, it’s July and the spring events are still posted, the latest press release is three months old – it sends a subliminal message that the organization is not engaged, vital or current. Furthermore, the real-time quality of the website content will also determine the quantity of repeat visitors to the website. Commit to maintaining real-time, accurate and relevant content.
- *Entertain* – There is a reason why the term *edutainment* is now common theory *and* practice in the business world today. Cities and businesses have learned that people learn faster and remember more when they are also entertained by the learning process. Taking a page from this business practice, generate *edutainment* value to portions of your website. Online content is written differently than business communication. It is all about conversational tone and repetition of key words to gain traction in the customer’s mind and search engines. Is there any reason why searching for information about a City’s economic development opportunities, city services or commercial property need be boring?
- *Easy* – Know what your customers want from your website. Make it easy for them to find it. Make it easy to navigate and access the most requested information, answer the questions and connect the dots. Keep the click thrus to a minimum when taking people to other pages. In addition to having the power to drive Search Engine Optimization (SEO), online content must appeal to a reader’s natural tendency to scan. Keep the content in blocks rather than big, continuous paragraphs. Make the language more dialogue than text book.
- *Enterprise* – Every organization benefits from collecting names, e-mail addresses and interests of those visiting their websites. Use addresses to build a powerful marketing database and implement a robust Customer Relationship Management program. This tactic is among the most reliable and cost-effective marketing Elk River will do – think pennies as opposed to dollars per contact.

- ***Put Elk River on the Map.***

Treat the website Home Page for each organization as the “location finder” it is! Establishing Elk River’s location within the context of the area, region and state is a priority. Leverage Elk River’s location in Minnesota and its proximity to Twin Cities. Add a custom state and national map inset which positions Elk River clearly. This tells a powerful story of geographic location and proximity which can be exploited in many positive ways.

- *Collaborate on a Custom Map.* Use cooperative marketing to commission a single, customized graphic map that can be employed by all organizations.

4. Employ Brand Messaging to Build Reputation

The Elk River brand offers a positioning and platform for consistent messaging that reinforces Elk River's strengths and points of differentiation. Its variations on the basic themes allows all types of organizations the opportunity to adopt one or more of the theme variations to compatibly further their marketing claims while supporting the overarching objective of building the Elk River reputation.

- ***The Powerful Story***

At a time when the earth was young and pure, the last great glacier moved slowly across what is now Minnesota, leaving in its wake a wonderland of hardwood forested hills abundant with vast herds and great deep rivers teeming with life. And a place of serenity and calm.

As the Europeans came and created vast cities in the East, they longed for that serenity. So at the confluence of the Elk and mighty Mississippi rivers, Elk River, Minnesota was born.

Elk River was destined to become a community that would provide a safe and comfortable home to those who pursue a simpler way of life. Easily existing just the right distance between the amenities of the big city and the easy pace of country living. Home to people who have an overpowering affinity for the great outdoors. Who believe their heart and passions are powered by nature. Who celebrate an innovative and caring lifestyle. A people who have captured the energy. In themselves. In their community. And in the possibilities. And who understand the unlimited opportunities that exist in this place called Elk River.

- ***The Brand Positioning/Brand Promise***

For people who want to breathe the outdoors, yet want access to big city amenities, Elk river is an emerging small city where the Elk and Mississippi Rivers flow together on the fringe of the Twin Cities, where the heart is powered by its nature, so you're energized and inspired to make a difference.

- ***The Brand Tagline: Powered by Nature.***

A deliberate double-entendre that perfectly and succinctly captures Elk River's distinguishing characteristics by linking the business of energy and innovation and their energizing lifestyle with the compassionate core values and resourcefulness of its residents with the natural beauty and abundance of the area – a powerful and compelling story that makes Elk River a "power" to be reckoned with.

- ***The Brand at Work***

Energy. Power. Current. Flow. The words and phrases incorporated in the brand story, brand positioning and brand promise are ripe with opportunity, positive interpretation and variations on a theme. Employed as a verb, these

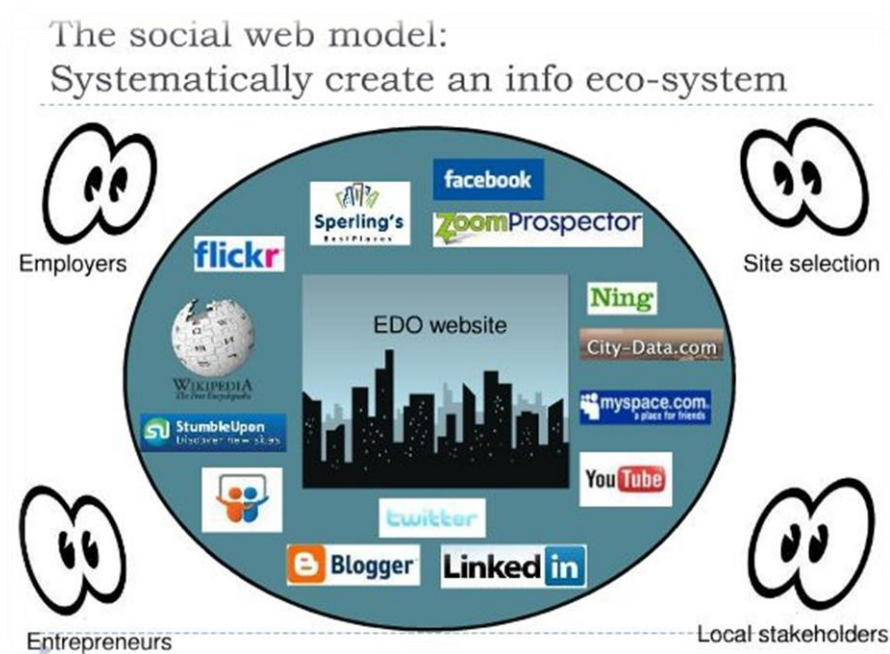
words can be attached naturally to a great variety of other descriptive words to describe and define the character that motivates Elk River, its people and its business and community culture.

- ***Powered by nature.*** Powered by people, family, friendship, life, innovation, success, proximity, accessibility, resources, neighborhoods, community, the arts, design, progress, recycling, faith, competition, opportunity, achievement, connections, purpose, strength, the hills, conviction, invention, service, history, heritage, rail, seasons (spring, summer, fall, winter).
- ***Energized by nature.*** Energized by people, family, friendship, life, innovation, success, proximity, accessibility, resources, neighborhoods, community, the arts, design, progress, recycling, faith, competition, opportunity, achievement, connections, purpose, strength, the hills, conviction, invention, service, history, heritage, rail, seasons (spring, summer, fall, winter).
- ***Powered or Energized to*** live, serve, compete, innovate, explore, prosper, succeed, make a difference, preserve, grow, change, build, achieve, connect, play, ride, cycle, bike, ski, fish, boat, hunt, walk, run, jog.

5. Deploy Social Media

Recognizing the value and proliferation of social media in the marketplace and its place in this country's economy is the first step. Selecting and implementing the best tools for Elk River is the next step. This Plan recommends that the Brand Navigators, the City and the EDA focus their valuable time and resources to develop a robust social media presence on the top four (4) social media channels: Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and Twitter. These are the top "go-to" social media channels being used consistently by those seeking information or screening a city for consideration, and used together, they will most effectively help you build and sustain your brand reputation.

To prove the point for the power of social media, this graphic illustrates the variety and intensity of social media influence on decision-makers *and* on the image and reputation of Elk River.



- **Tap the Power of the Top Four Social Media Channels.**

Elk River public and private sectors are currently employing some social media. This section recommends weighting the deployment of social media so that the influence of social media is concentrated and optimized into the channels favored by the most customers. Specific strategies and tactics for organizations will be detailed in later sections.

- *Assemble an Elk River "Choir".* Social media channels are the perfect opportunity to easily and purposefully coordinate these public and private sector channels and put them to work building Elk River's brand and reputation. With just a little thought and commitment, every organization and company can contribute.
- *Use the Brand Navigator Communications Plan as the baseline.* Coordinate with Brand Navigator goals and objectives, calendars and projects so that the branded messaging is reinforcing and benefiting the brand goals as well as organization and company goals.



Facebook <http://www.Facebook.com/> With over 500 million users across the globe, this social media channel is a powerhouse. Almost 72% of internet users are on Facebook and users reflect a multi-generational growth with 13% of users between the ages of 45-64 and 52% of users between 18-34.

More cities, companies and economic development organizations are using Facebook as yet another communication channel to connect with a variety of audiences. Facebook Pages allow Elk River to tap another communication channel which reinforces and strengthens the Elk River brand. You can post photos, videos, messages, press releases, news of activities and events, ask questions, engage in entertaining trivia and promote benefits.

- *Build and Sustain a Powerful Facebook Channel.* Coordinate messaging on Facebook pages. Use the Social Media Plan to coordinate the Elk River messaging. The EDA, Energy City, Fire Department, Parks & Recreation, Elk River Liquor Stores Facebook pages and many companies and organizations have created Facebook pages – all are an opportunity to build synergy in messaging and content that builds Elk River presence. Coordinate City and private sector messaging to enhance Facebook depth and content while promoting a synergistic Elk River experience that supports the brand and reputation.
- *Build content to drive SEO.* Populate the site with Elk River and Brand Navigator news, happenings, photos and activities. Use available content

from Brand Navigator initiatives, City and EDA websites to keep it easily managed and consistent. This concentration of content will help drive SEO and Social Media Prevalence tracking while building a following of fans and contributors.

- *Promote Elk River.* Develop a featured theme for the Elk River Facebook page: *Powered by Nature: Twelve Months of Elk River* will feature specific, brand-oriented monthly themes for activity and events in Elk River and engage people in commenting, posting photographs and contributing to theme development with short stories, poetry and art.
 - **January: Powered by Fire & Ice** – interpreting the brand promise in terms of homey, warm activities or cold and invigorating activities.
 - **February: Energized by Love** – interpreting the brand promise in terms of Valentine’s Day, love, marriage, compassion, relationships, friends, caring.
 - **March: Powered by Nature** – interpreting the brand promise through the twin pillars of the Energy Expo and the Business & Lifestyle Expo.
 - **April: Energized by Spring** – interpreting the brand promise in terms of new beginnings, spring clean-ups, renewed commitments to recycling.
 - **May: Powered by Good Taste** – interpreting the brand promise in terms of The Taste of Elk River building appreciation and support for local food, locally owned restaurants, farmer’s markets and savory experiences.
 - **June: Energized by Music & Arts** – interpreting the brand promise in terms of the music and arts featured at the Riverfront Concerts, Downtown’s ArtSoup Festival and KidStock.
 - **July: Powered by Patriotism** – interpreting the brand promise in terms of family celebrations, Elk River history and traditional 4th of July events and activities.
 - **August: Energized by Summer** – interpreting the brand promise in terms of the robust outdoor lifestyle and experiences enjoyed by Elk River residents.
 - **September: Powered by Purpose** – interpreting the brand promise in terms of the value of labor, working people, jobs, business and industry innovation and home-grown products.
 - **October: Energized by Fall** – interpreting the brand promise in terms of change: changing leaves, changing weather, changing habits and activities; changing gears.
 - **November: Powered by Compassion** – interpreting the brand promise in terms of appreciation for one another, thoughtfulness and recognition of random acts of kindness.
 - **December: Energized by the Holidays** – interpreting the brand promise through the eyes of children of all faiths and celebrations; holiday events and activities.
- *Continue to Encourage and Support the Local Realtors “365 Things to Do in Elk River.”* This organic and on-going list is an example of public and private sector collaboration that builds reputation. It reflects a compilation of small and large

events, activities, festivals and every day things that contribute to the quality of life in Elk River.

- Brand Navigators can share their Social Media Plan and the Twelve Months of Elk River themes to keep the energy flowing.
- Ask local realtors to coordinate their daily suggestions with the Brand Navigators and seek new perspective from residents, Brand Navigators and special interest groups like young people and athletes.



YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/> Over 75% of the internet users in the United States view videos online and YouTube has over 258 million registered users, 50% of whom visit weekly or more. Over 3 billion views are registered online each day. Posting to YouTube is easy! It may seem trivial but it helps drive SEO and helps viewers see Elk River in a more dimensional way. Obviously, the best entries are those that move people or make them laugh or think.

- *Create an Elk River You Tube Media Channel.* An Elk River Brand Navigators media file on YouTube offers Elk River a new and highly visible media channel that helps to create an Elk River presence in the search engine.
- *Consolidate Elk River's Story.* Collect, review and edit all high quality Elk River video and B-roll available and filtered for "brand" compatibility; upload to the YouTube file. Contact all community organizations, service clubs and companies to request their videos from which you can create a "mash-up" or just upload as individual postings in the Elk River folder.
- *Launch an Elk River Video Competition.* Everyone loves to film events, activities and people. Tap into this energy and launch an Elk River video contest to stimulate interest in creatively representing Elk River.
 - All videos must be at least one minute in length, no more than two minutes in length; all videos will be reviewed for appropriate content and juried before selection.
 - Theme: *Elk River-Naturally!* This can be a single event or activity or a collection of events, activities, a naturally occurring event or a natural asset, special events, attractions - humorous incidents, happenings or moving experiences.
 - Select a jury representing a cross-section of the community – elected officials, community leaders, artists, engineers, young, old, diversity.
 - Create a prize of \$500.00 for the winning entry; \$250 for second place and \$100 for third place.

- Arrange for the top ten videos to be showcased at a Red Carpet Gala; award the prizes at this event. Winning video will be featured on the Elk River website and other websites as well as posted on YouTube.



Twitter <http://twitter.com/> – 75 million users and growing! Although not the preferred social media for site selectors now – 64% said that it had no applicability for site selection – Twitter is the social media of choice for people on the move. Used for daily contact, political commentary, experience sharing and recommending products and services, over 3 million messages are posted on Twitter daily. Elk River can be included in those messages as another communication channel for raising Elk River’s profile.

- *Grow the Elk River Twitter channel.* Using the Social Media Plan, launch and sustain a robust Twitter dialogue with fans and followers. Remembering that Twitter is a conversational tool, craft your Twitter messages to intrigue and provoke interest in Elk River – invite but do not advertise.
- *Use TIPPO as your guide.* This acronym describes the characteristics that stimulate the most effective social media communication.
 - T – Timeliness (something is happening now or soon)
 - I – Importance (take advantage or don’t forget something now)
 - P – Prominence (the Governor is arriving today)
 - P – Proximity (something occurring close and not to be missed)
 - O – Oddity (strange, unusual, unique)
- *Talk about benefits.* Offer discounts, special coupons, invitations, resident or personality testimonials to drive action. Benefits call attention to featured events, activities, special promotions and programs in terms of benefit to your audiences.
- *Get the conversation going with questions.* Use questions to interest and intrigue. People are more likely to respond to a question than a statement.
 - Energized by River’s Edge Concert! What did you like best?
 - Powerful ArtSoup this year! What grabbed your attention?
 - Powered by ice and blade! Skating at The Pit was a blast! Going again?



LinkedIn <http://www.linkedin.com/> - In a recent survey, 71% of site selectors used LinkedIn to connect with potential sites. Linked In operates the world's largest professional network on the Internet with more than 100 million members in over 200

countries and territories. Roughly one million new members join LinkedIn every week. There were nearly two billion people searches on LinkedIn in 2010. As of January 2011, LinkedIn counts executives from all 2010 Fortune 500 companies as members. More than 2 million companies have LinkedIn Company Pages.

- *Create a LinkedIn channel for Elk River, the EDA and the Brand Navigators.*
Create a profile page for the Brand Navigators, the City and the EDA.
 - Use it as a marketing vehicle for Elk River EDA and Elk River – keeping it fresh with Elk River brand news and information relevant to site selectors and commercial realtors and investors.
 - Join the Economic Development Groups to grow awareness among peer groups.
 - Post plans, slideshows and contribute a weekly commentary or quote to stay top-of-mind among LinkedIn visitors.

6. Energize Public Relations

While social media channels are now embedded as a Public Relations tactic, it is important to recognize the value and necessity of a robust, traditional Public Relations strategy to advance and establish the Elk River brand in online and offline trade and consumer channels. While each organization will pursue specific target markets, a basic local, regional and state Editorial Calendar of ideas and editorial development is provided here as a starting point:

- ***Build a Following for Elk River.***

Elk River has a lot going on and a lot going for it. People just don't know about it. Change that with a well-executed Public Relations plan.

- *Use the brand to "re-launch" Elk River.* The brand gives you the opportunity and platform to re-launch and re-frame Elk River as the vital, energized, powerful community. Start with the Calendar of Events in the Community Resource Guide, the themes from the Twelve Months of Elk River, every big promotion and activity produced by Parks and Recreation and those associated with the River's Edge Business Association.
 - Take these events regional and statewide. Never underestimate the appeal of festivals, concerts at the river's edge, farmer's markets and unusual events that help you showcase the compelling story of Elk River. People are attracted to day trip experiences if they know about them.
 - Plan at least three press releases a month, most delivered electronically. Assign a month and drop date for each press release and social media application.
 - Allow your staff at least thirty (30) days advance for preparation and send the releases out by e-mail contact list at least ten days in advance.

- ***Build a Business Reputation for Elk River.***

Elk River has a great business story to tell and a strong economic development platform. Share it. Assemble a list of items that will increase Elk River's profile and create more "buzz" among regional audiences. These topical issues must include:

- *Good News.* Every public policy issue under consideration or recently passed that "energizes" the Elk River business environment.
- *Controversial News.* Every policy issue under consideration or recently passed which may be perceived or in fact will have a negative influence on the Elk River brand or business environment. Elk River needs to get out in front of it and frame it from the City's perspective.

- *EDA Initiatives.* Every new EDA initiative including new website improvements; revitalization, development announcements; public/private partnerships or collaborations; “branding” news and activities; new business or company start-ups or relocations grants, incentives and loans.
- *Business Workshops.* Every Chamber or EDA workshop, program or training session intended to advance the economic development of Elk River.
- *New in Town.* Monthly release featuring every new business moving into, opening or expanding in Elk River including quotes from owners and operators.
- *Downtown.* Quarterly progress updates on the Downtown development.
- *Elk River by Nature.* Produce a monthly planning calendar for media distribution that focuses on developing the outdoor, nature, soft adventure, high octane or “get away from it all” serenity themes that define the character of the Elk River lifestyle.
- *Powered by Nature.* Produce a quarterly progress report that catalogs the brand “umbrella” of energy, energy innovation, go green and environmental initiatives that are at the heart of Elk River’s brand identity.
- ***Enhance your calendar with featured “set pieces.”***

Add to the calendar a group of Elk River and EDA “set pieces” – feature articles that are released at scheduled intervals throughout a calendar year. Some examples for development include:

 - *Why Elk River?* Interview with Mayor, City Administrator, EDA Director focusing on directions, plans, connections and business programs associated with living and doing business in Elk River.
 - *Elk River “energized” by Business.* A feature article focusing on the industry clusters in Elk River, their growth and influence on the city, state, region and nation; their value and innovations.
 - *Elk River Powered by Nature.* The value of the city’s natural assets and amenities that create and sustain an enviable quality of life for residents and a compatible environment for business.
 - *Elk River – Where Energy Meets Purpose.* Focuses on short term activities and improvements that influence the business environment.
 - *Elk River Currents.* Focuses on any and all activity and improvements considered or underway that enable and improve the accessibility, and proximity factors that make Elk River a preferred place to live and conduct business.

- *Powerful Elk River Business Success Stories.* Assemble a set of stories that feature your major industry and business owners.
 - *Industry:* What they do, how they do it, their scope of influence, their connections with other companies, their employees, their successes, testimonials for headquartering in Elk River.
 - *Small Business:* What they do, how they do it, their scope of influence, their connections with other companies, their employees, their successes, testimonials for headquartering in Elk River.
- ***Build a Strong Media Database.***

Starting with Minnesota media and building out, spread the word about Elk River using your own database or employing a PR distribution company. This basic media list must be supplemented with the online and offline business, trade and industry media channels identified in the City and EDA sections of the Plan.

<http://www.mnnews.com/>
<http://www.shgresources.com/mn/radio/>
<http://newslink.org/mntele.html>

IV. The Brand as Community-Building Platform

When it comes to branding and marketing a community image and reputation in the age of technology and social media, the residents and community organizations in Elk River must become allies. Whether advancing an economic development agenda or addressing livability and quality of life issues, Elk River's residents and its community organizations play a vital role in the perception of the community. They talk among themselves, to their colleagues and friends at work and their friends and family across the state and country every day about the community in which they live. The Elk River brand offers you a platform from which you can cultivate authentic and productive relationships with residents and community organizations. Sharing and promoting the brand messaging, backed up by the brand promise, will start building a stronger voice for Elk River.

Strategy: *To engage residents and community organizations in embracing the brand as an expression of their pride to help promote Elk River as a place to live and do business.*

Tactics

1. Leverage Community Strength

Elk River has a long history of community pride and community involvement. The Elk River brand provides the City and its community the opportunity to re-connect in meaningful ways. By effectively and purposefully leveraging that intrinsic pride and involvement, you can help orchestrate and build brand awareness and brand reputation. Building stronger bridges among and between public and private organizations, community leadership and residents is worth the investment of time and effort and your most affordable form of marketing.

- ***Initiate the Elk River Community Coalition.***

Communities across the country from Long Beach, CA to Arlington, TX to Charlotte, NC have created and nurtured community coalitions – forums that provide residents and community and business leadership the opportunity to share their individual and collective ideas, solutions, talent, skills and creative energy with public and private sector decision-makers at regularly scheduled intervals.

- *Schedule a Community Forum.* Make the brand roll-out the centerpiece. Task them with seeing the brand through their individual eyes and perspectives and ask them to imagine and identify ways the brand can be extended into the neighborhoods, business corridors, businesses, social organizations, schools, churches and recreation.

- *Topic Tables.* Once the “general session” portion of the program is concluded, task the participants to join Topic Tables at which facilitators will focus discussion and debate on how to manage community challenges and leverage community opportunities.
- Topic Tables vary from community to community and year to year but some of the obvious topics for Elk River include:
 - ☐ Neighborhood
 - ☐ Workforce
 - ☐ Education
 - ☐ Infrastructure
 - ☐ Economic Development
 - ☐ Quality of Life Issues
 - ☐ Parks & Recreation
 - ☐ Downtown Revitalization
- *Identify Coalition Talent.* Solicit names and e-mails and areas of interest from among those attending and participating. From this list, the City of Elk River and the Elk River Brand Navigators (representing a cross-section of the community) can select and appoint a group of residents who will form the nucleus of the Elk River Community Coalition.
- *Commit to hosting an Annual Community Forum.* This annual Forum serves many purposes useful and helpful to both public sector and private sector interests.
 - An organized and formatted opportunity in which to listen to and respond to resident issues and concerns
 - An opportunity to tout brand progress
 - An opportunity to tout City achievements
 - Generate out-of-the-box thinking to tackle a sticky issue
 - Residential and business Survey opportunities
 - Stimulate networking and collaborations
 - Engage in constructive problem-solving
 - Enhance community and business leadership investment in Elk River’s health, welfare and future

2. Leverage Community Organizations

Elk River is fortunate to have energetic and productive community organizations that can serve as examples of the Elk River energy and spirit that defines it. While these organizations are often considered internal community assets, finding compatible ways to leverage their service by connecting it to the brand and brand promise will extend the Elk River brand and its reputation into new channels.

- ***Elk River Chamber of Commerce***

The Chamber as a community outreach channel is vital to building solid bridges between local business owners and customers and potential business start-ups, expansions or relocations.

- *The Chamber as Energy.* Define a specific business-related role for the Chamber in the branding process, roll-out and sustainability. Some high profile and very important opportunities may be:
 - Communication and recruitment of their membership to champion the brand messaging and incorporate it in their business communications, websites and products
 - Coordinated Chamber Task Forces to interface with the Brand Navigators on branded programs to engage employees or a specific task like employing the brand to assist with business retention.
- *Chamber as "Visitor" Marketer.* Leverage the Chamber membership and business promotion mission to get people off the highways and into Downtown Elk River. The Chamber is the logical organization to work with the Brand Navigators and the City to sponsor a campaign to entice traffic off the highways and into Downtown.
 - Seasonal Billboards. A great cooperative marketing campaign that gives the Elk River brand massive exposure while driving people into Downtown during the peak "traveling North" months of summer and early fall.
 - Create "Buzz" with FREE branded merchandise. Provide Downtown perimeter gas stations, convenience stores and Downtown retail, restaurants and services with a bulk-purchased, re-branded energy bar like Power Bars (described in The Brand as Marketing Platform section) to use as a "thanks for coming" giveaway to those who stop in on their way north. This relatively affordable campaign will generate "buzz" among those receiving the free bars and stimulate positive word-of-mouth.
- *Leverage Chamber profile to enhance Economic Development.* Power up the website and the Chamber's role in promoting and supporting economic development. Site selectors and commercial brokers often turn to the Chamber website for information and data as well as for a sense of the community. The Elk River Chamber could prove to be a more powerful

partner by expanding the content to reflect the EDA content and incorporate brand language that validates the community brand.

- Expand the Relocating a Business page to include introductory details on primary site selector search items: Incentives, Process, Competitive Data; keep links to the EDA operable.

- **CAER (Community Aid Elk River)**

The Vision Statement of CAER is: "*Hunger is no longer a barrier to the health and well-being of people in our community.*" Passion, energized and inspired by nature takes on special meaning when applied to this community food shelf and their mission to connect basic staples of living with Elk River residents in need.

- *The CAER as Inspiration.* Define a specific point of intersection for the brand messaging in the everyday work of this organization. Their work reflects the heart of Elk River in a concrete way as the brand reflects the character of Elk River.
- *Brand Community Connections.* Where there is affinity and synergy there is opportunity for the brand to be adopted as the theme of a community program: Thanksgiving Food Drive – *Energized to Share.*

- **Arts Alliance**

An active arts organization that specializes in producing concert series, festivals, workshops and events with public/private funding is a community and reputation-building asset.

- *The Arts Alliance as Passion.* Define a creative role for the Arts Alliance that encourages graphic, visual, performance art and narrative interpretations of the brand and brand messaging that inspires connection to the brand. These interpretations can be anything from sidewalk chalk festivals to art using recycled materials, gifts and merchandise posted online and requisitioned for marketing programs and promotions.
- *Competitions.* Consider developing and promoting a series of juried, artistic competitions to engage local artists of all ages; offer appropriate prizes and rewards for the efforts; secure artist releases for use on brand marketing materials.

- **River's Edge Business Association**

Representing Downtown merchants and building owners, this association will be pivotal to the revitalization of the downtown as a place of commerce and gathering.

- *The Downtown as Energized.* Rally the Association to the brand by demonstrating how the platform will work to their advantage. Specific strategies and tactics included in this Plan highlight Business Start-Up competitions, shared-use work spaces, re-purposed space and temporary

uses and promotions intended to build the Downtown core and capture drive traffic off the Highways 10 and 169.

- ***Service Organizations***

The Rotary, Lions and others can be great allies in brand extension. The membership of service organizations is a roll call of local business owners, managers and company executives as well as active and engaged residents.

- *The Service Organizations as Making a Difference.* Tap into this powerful network and grass roots membership by asking them to help you carry the banner for the Elk River brand by providing testimonials, adopting brand messaging in their communication channels and connecting the brand to their fundraising and charitable service work.

- ***YMCA***

Offering a wholesome, clean, safe environment for individual or family health and fitness is a perfect connection to the Elk River brand promise.

- *The YMCA and Other Healthy Lifestyle Organizations as Energy.* The YMCA enjoys an excellent reputation in Elk River and affords the Brand Navigators the opportunity to directly connect the brand and brand messaging with the goals and mission of the YMCA and other health care and lifestyle-oriented organizations. Incorporating the brand messaging in their campaigns and promotions and communication channels and marketing as well as helping collect healthy lifestyle quotes and testimonials that can be posted online and used in branded marketing materials is a start.

- ***Tap into the Power & Energy at Elk River Schools***

Young people are the future of Elk River and helping them understand their roots and what makes Elk River tick can start with a brand building program that does double duty: encourages skill building, inspires thinking and innovation and motivates students.

- *Powered by Nature Writing Competition.* Working with Elk River teachers, create and launch a yearly theme competition for students Grades 3-12: *Powered by Nature: What This Means to Me.* Ask students to interpret the meaning and relevance of this statement as it relates to the environment, nature, business, lifestyle, quality of life, school, sports, activities, volunteer work and any variation they see and feel.
- *Powered by Nature Science Project Competition.* Working with Elk River teachers, create a framework for tapping the talents of students interested in science and innovation. *Powered by Nature* can inspire students to invent a new product or service or practice or introduce an innovation and improvement for an existing product, service or practice tapping into the powerful combination of energy and nature, natural resources, recycling, green initiatives or agricultural implications.

- *Inspired by Nature Art Competition.* Not just any art. Art inspired by the brand theme and interpreted in recycled materials! Imagination runs wild, attention is drawn to new possibilities and the “nature” of Elk River is featured in balance.
- *Award Scholarships.* The Brand Navigators will create the on-going scholarships and either seed them and/or seek obvious industry cluster sponsors for the projects.
 - It is recommended that the scholarships be funded annually to build reputation and status.
 - Make them substantive to encourage participation: \$1,000 for first place; \$500 for second place and \$250 for third place.
- *Recognize the winners and participants.* Ask the Elk River Star to cover the events and finalists and write a story about the winning entries; post the story and winning entries with photos of the students on the Facebook page, the City’s website, Brand Navigator’s website and every other public and private sector website engaged in branding Elk River.
 - Prepare and distribute press release for regional media outlets accompanied by video footage and/or photography.
 - Send press release to Popular Science (they feature talented students in science).
- **Elk River Star, Channel 12**

These two communication channels are important connections with your residents and business community. Hopefully, these opinion makers will be part of the Brand Navigators and inclined to help you share the Elk River brand messaging and its potential with these audiences.

 - *Community Brand.* After the brand champions have been hard and work and the brand initiatives are underway and delivering results, ask the Elk River Star to prepare a feature piece or special insert featuring the brand work and its implications and opportunities.
 - *Brand Navigator Energized.* Ask for a monthly column in which the work of the Brand Navigators for Elk River will be discussed. Feature brand initiatives, competitions, calendars, products and local and regional testimonials.
 - *Brand the Channel 12 program.* Encourage the Mayor to use this Channel 12 platform to speak about the Elk River brand in brand messaging terms. The Mayor can influence his constituents to think about Elk River’s connection to energy and nature in a new way.
 - Use the Mayor’s Channel 12 program to include a *Powered by Nature* brand segment in which a relevant brand topic is introduced. The editorial

calendar and Twelve Months of Elk River can serve as a baseline for topics.

- *Powered by Nature* Program. Hosted by the Chief Brand Navigator or Chair, a thirty minute interview show once a month featuring community, business leadership, young people and other special interest advocates interpreting the brand and brand promise for Elk River and the quality of life could be a very interesting and exciting program.

3. Leverage Existing Community Events

The City and other organizations in Elk River produce a series of well-attended public events that bring residents and visitors together in celebration each year. Elk River has an amazing opportunity to leverage this accessibility to hundreds or thousands of people and engage them in fun and constructive ways to promote the City.

- ***Make it fun!***

The most effective and organic way to engage residents in helping you polish the image of Elk River is to use every special event staged by the City or another organization as an opportunity to interact with residents... and collect their stories.

- *Establish a High Profile Presence.* Set up an *Elk River: Powered by Nature! Tell Us Your Story...* booth and outfit it with a videographer, microphone, photographer and scribe to take notes; release forms must be available for filming.
- *Story-telling.* Everybody has a story and people love to tell their stories. Encourage individuals, couples and families to stop by the booth and talk about one or more of the following topics:
 - How Elk River energizes their life
 - Favorite family tradition
 - What they like best about Elk River
 - Favorite things to do or places to go in Elk River
 - Funny stories or heartwarming stories
 - Business success stories
- *Capture Comments.* Create a written response card for people who don't care to be filmed but are happy to make a comment; ask the question: *What do you like best about living in Elk River?*
- *Collect e-mails.* Make it a habit to collect e-mails from everyone stopping by the booth. This builds your resident, visitor and potential customer databases.
- *Create an Elk River story and post it.* Edit the video tape for posting on the Elk River website, Facebook page(s), You Tube and Brand Navigators page.
- *Make it worthwhile.* Everyone who is filmed or completes a response card will be entered into a random drawing to be conducted at the end of the event; offer a prize that is relevant today and will encourage and excite people during these troubled economic times: solicit the prize from retailers in Elk River -a big screen television, laptop, or iPad *or the equivalent of one*

month's mortgage or rent up to \$1,000 *or* groceries for one month up to \$500.00.

- *Booth Team.* Staff the booth with knowledgeable city employees who can manage any visitor concerns or complaints; log every concern or complaint and make the commitment to follow-up within five (5) working days with an answer or status. This builds good faith and confidence and will improve the chances that the resident speaks well of Elk River.

- ***Fire & Ice Festival***

One of many City-organized and produced events staged during the year, this festival showcases "The Pit" and affords Elk River the opportunity to connect the brand and brand promise directly to the pursuit of family fun and a healthy lifestyle.

- *Consider re-branding Parks & Recreation festivals and events.* Draw on the brand to create a single umbrella term or phrase that captures the core values of the events and festivals being staged. This connects the dots between the events and activities and assigns them a defining and appealing characteristic: *Get Energized Naturally or Energized by Nature.*

- ***Energy EXPO and Business & Lifestyle EXPO***

The Chamber's EXPO connecting local product and services with residents is a perfect opportunity to collaborate on marketing and messaging to support the EXPO and build brand reputation.

- *Powered by Nature.* Connect the two great strengths of Elk River – its power (people, business, energy-base, lifestyle) and its Nature (people, character, history, compassion, natural beauty and amenities).

- ***Riverfront Concert Series.***

Inspired by Nature. Staged at the stunning River's Edge Commons at the bend in the Mississippi, this concert series can easily be branded to reflect the convergence of natural and man-made assets.

- ***Annual Downtown ArtSoup Festival.***

Inspired by Passion. Energized by Nature. Inspired by Nature. When ArtSoup looks for a theme, the brand promise provides a variety of words and phrases, brand messaging and variations on a theme that can easily lend them to thematic interpretation.

- ***Sherburne County Fair.***

Go BIG! Everybody goes to the fair – company CEOs and their families, company site selectors and their families and thousands of people from the region. Take full advantage of these potential customers and make a big statement for Elk River.

- *Partner.* Coordinate a community presence at this Fair each year. Pitch an impressive tent, collaborate with community organizations (YMCA, DIRTWX, Realtors), City staff and private sector volunteers willing and able to represent and promote Elk River as a place to live and do business.
- *Make it fun!* Create a stationary bicycle event (a real, mounted mountain bike is preferred) or a stationary work-out cycle and challenge people to cover the most miles within 30 seconds.
 - Just for trying: Elk River-wrapped Power Bars or approved, re-branded Energy Drinks
 - Top Winner: mountain bike, skis, watercraft
 - Collect names and e-mails for all database segments.
- **ERX Motorpark**
 Relatively new on the scene but fully engaged and excited about partnering, the ERX Motorpark is another opportunity for Elk River to leverage an attraction and high profile activity to promote their brand identity and interact with potential customers.
 - *Signage.* Consider permanent, branded signage on the grounds.
 - *Marketing.* Encourage distribution of a branded *Elk River: Powered by Nature* postcard distributed at competitive events or use this venue as a distribution point for the re-branded energy bars or snacks.
- **Oliver H. Kelley Farm.**
 This wonderful, working farm and special event attraction on the perimeter of Elk River is a treasure. Although not engaged in a formal tourism development program, Elk River can benefit from working with the management team to heighten Elk River's profile. Visitors need to know about Elk River.
 - Arrange for an attractive Elk River postcard with a quarterly calendar of major events is available for free distribution in the Museum.
 - Use this farm as a distribution for the free branded, wrapped Elk River Power Bars and an invitation to visit Downtown.
- **Stay in Touch.**
 Elk River can use the brand as a re-energized start to connecting with residents and businesses online. Using simple, affordable survey tools found in Constant Contact, reach out to people with an easy but very important set of questions.
 - *Annual Resident Survey.* Plan and launch a yearly resident's Survey to monitor traction for City projects, measure community interaction and knowledge and inspire new ideas, new activities or new ways of doing things.

- *Annual Business Survey.* Ask businesses what they like, want, have, need and expect. Use the intelligence collected to re-think policy or practice, create new programs, build champions and stronger businesses.
- *Respond.* Whatever the question or remark – respond. Better that you know what they are saying and address it as best you can, than not know what they are saying and be surprised.

V. The Brand as a City Platform.

The Elk River brand is a powerful platform to fuse an authentic identity with a well-earned and positive reputation. The City of Elk River must be a prime driver in this initiative. In fact, it may be said that without City commitment, the Elk River brand risks floating on the surface as a mere slogan rather than taking root and flourishing as a powerful and energizing statement about Elk River.

The brand also recognizes that smart cities must strike a balance between doing what they must do to create a sustainable quality of life for their residents AND attracting and retaining businesses and industries that are compatible with that quality of life. Finding the right balance allows cities to grow and “compete” more effectively. Elk River’s brand identity and reputation is at the core of that balance.

While noting that Elk River gets high marks from customers for service and interaction, the brand promise challenges the City to take it to the next level. To improve competitive positioning by developing a culture and consistently delivered, authentically branded customer-centric strategies and tactics that enhance existing business interactions, polish the pro-business reputation and transform people into enthusiastic champions for the City.

Build an authentic customer-centric organization.

This asks the City and the EDA team to evaluate their forms, processes and customer interaction and cultivate the team’s customer-centric skills and capacity from a customer perspective – all intended to help your team create and sustain a customer-centric operation that lives up to the brand promise and builds reputation as a City that values their existing businesses and is serious about attracting new business.

Cultivate private sector champions for the City.

This asks the City and EDA to recognize that site selector and developer screening is happening in new ways – and these new ways make it imperative that the City’s image, reputation and relationship with existing businesses be viewed through a different prism. This asks the City to remember that their reputation is also made and cultivated by their businesses and residents. This is part and parcel of the brand mission – to build an “army” of Elk River champions beyond the walls of City Hall.

Communicating with passion, purpose and precision.

This asks the City and EDA to think of communications and marketing as a vital and integral strategy for development and redevelopment, and most certainly for brand building and reputation-making. This asks the City to understand that marketing, brand messaging and targeted communication must be integrated, synergistic and focused to achieve the traction to reinforce perceptions and build reputation.

Strategy: To strengthen the City's brand identity and build a reputation that positively influences and inspires compatible residential, community and business environments, empowers economic development capacity and energizes Elk River's ability to sustainably manage and deliver its Vision.

Tactics

1. Align Branding Goals with City's Vision and Goals.

The City of Elk River has invested time and resources in developing a Vision supported by a set of specific Goals: *Innovation, Community Development, Beautification and Opportunities*. The Elk River brand promise and the Brand Plan are specifically designed and developed to support the City Vision and empower the City Goals. While these specific strategies and tactics are headquartered in appropriate sections throughout this Plan, this review of the City Goals highlights the strong and direct connections between what the City intends to accomplish and how the Brand can help and empower.

- ***Innovation*** – “Develop new programs and services to meet the needs of the community.” This Plan proposes a variety of affordable online and offline strategies, projects and programs that complement this goal including website evaluation and recommendations; online permit and processing capacity; communication enhancements and community interaction; and other city and economic development “best practices.”
- ***Community Development*** – “Enhance community involvement and public participation.” This Plan proposes enhancements to communication channels including the newsletter and social media; recommends a more robust public relations outreach; and provides the tools to imbed the brand to foster greater community pride.
- ***Beautification*** – “Attractive welcoming streetscapes at City entrances and primary corridors.” This Plan corroborates the streetscaping, façade and gateway signage goals with specific recommendations that help achieve the brand expectation.
- ***Opportunities*** – “Foster a pro-growth atmosphere that provides incentives and other opportunities for new and existing businesses.” This Plan offers a customized set of branded economic development “best practices” to empower the economic development presence, capacity and competitive positioning of Elk River and revitalize the Downtown plans.

2. Harness the Power of Communication

The City of Elk River is in enviable position. The City is perceived, and is in fact, a good place to live and work. And the brand identity and brand promise affords the City an opportunity to reinforce and optimize this positioning.

- ***Consolidate the City's communication channels.***

Elk River is clearly dedicated to communicating with a variety of customers – residents, organizations, economic development targets and recreation visitors. The existing marketing materials and messaging illustrate commitment and resourcefulness but lack the cohesiveness and continuity of messaging and imagery so critical to the building of a coherent city and community reputation.

- *Chief Communications Manager.* The City of Elk River will benefit measurably from establishing a position whose sole focus is building and sustaining brand identity and implementing and managing a powerful communications plan. In fact, this decision is one of the most cost-effective marketing strategies the City can employ. This position will be charged with branding, building, extending and coordinating the various department communications in a way that reinforces the identity and reputation of the City. Among the benefits are:

- Create and coordinate a powerful, integrated and multi-disciplined communications plan.
- Plan and execute a coordinated print, electronic and social media editorial calendar.
- Develop and manage multiple, targeted databases.
- Create, produce and implement targeted business attraction newsletters, e-blasts and e-postcards.
- Cultivate relationships with local, state and regional media.
- Develop and manage trade and industry cluster media resources.
- Sustain and manage a robust website with relevant, real-time content.
- Create and manage a robust Customer Relationship Management tool to build and grow customer relationships on all levels.

- ***Rally departments to the strategy of coordinating communications.***

We understand that departments are profoundly attached to and rightfully proud of their marketing and communications. We are not diminishing or marginalizing the department contributions but rather proposing that all departments can benefit from a centralized communication point that optimizes the value, power and influence of their messaging while underscoring the strength of the Elk River brand.

- *Communications Manager as Coordinator.*

The consolidation of communications is about collaboration not elimination. It is not intended to curtail or relieve departments and their staffs of communication tasks. In fact, no one knows how better to communicate with customers than those in the trenches every day. The Manager must be seen as an ally and collaborator working with Department Heads to craft messaging that achieves their purpose while integrating the brand language for consistency.

- Take the time to manage the relationship between Department Heads and the Communications Manager; focus on the benefits of brand messaging and integration, and the value of fresh perspective.
- Require the Communications Manager to meet with department Heads when first hired and listen and learn from them.
- *Meet monthly.* Suggest monthly meetings among communication specialists and the Manager to coordinate communications; work out three months or more to formulate and produce a comprehensive and integrated communications plan.
- *Department Competition.* Use the brand platform as an opportunity to invite creativity in both extensions and interpretations as befits their particular department responsibility.
 - Challenge each department to employ the brand and brand language in compatible ways with their communications.
- **Align communication and marketing budgets.**

Branding a City must occur concurrently with every message issued by the City. As with the consolidation of communication responsibilities and coordination, the goal is to most cost effectively and powerfully communicate Elk River's identity and reputation. This suggests that the City will benefit from the departments consolidating their communications budgets, or at least aligning them, with this overarching City communications goal.

 - *Single Reporting.* City Council will have a single reporting source from which to monitor and measure communications expenditures and effectiveness.
 - *Economy of Scale.* The Communications Manager can more actively negotiate and manage favorable pricing and manage seek cost savings.
 - *Eliminate Redundancy and Duplication.* Any duplications and redundancies are more easily identified and avoided within a consolidated budget.

3. Everybody Sells Elk River!

The City of Elk River fields a relatively small but potentially mighty brand band! Harnessing every resource available to the City will magnify the messaging and extend the reach and impact of the Elk River brand and its core values.

- ***What you say and how you say it counts!***

Yes. All elected officials, city management and public employees are front line salespeople for their cities. What they say and how they say it is likely to influence a home buyer, a developer's decision to site visit or a site selector's decision to consider Elk River. So everyone must be engaged, informed and enthusiastic advocates.

- *Council Study Session.* Conduct a working Council Study Session to present key brand strategies and tactics. Provide Council members with talking points and a "one pager" of key strategies so they are always advantaged if asked questions by the press or community.
- *Give Everyone the Facts.* Provide every employee with a "one pager" that captures the key talking points of the brand evolution, brand promise and messaging.
 - Tell everyone about what influences decision-makers; connect the dots between the vitality of business and the City's desired quality of life. Everyone is literally "invested" in the success of the Elk River brand.
- *Set up a Staff Pipeline.* Create a pipeline for employees in the field and in the office to suggest brand ideas, customer service changes or improvements either anonymously or attributed. Read them all and respond to them to sustain engagement.
- *Reward Brand Promise Behavior.* Recognize every act of customer service that helps Elk River build a reputation for delivering a consistent customer experience. Offer one hour of Personal Time Off (PTO) for every five good, documented customer service comments received or collect and award movie tickets, product coupons or vouchers, lunches.

- ***Cross-department collaboration is a competitive asset.***

Silos are deadly in government environments and suicidal in competitive environments. It is clear that the City values, practices and encourages interdepartmental communication. However, the brand promise offers the City a new and sturdy platform for encouraging and cultivating respectful and productive working relationships that deliver on the brand promise consistently and support the City's effort to establish and sustain their reputation.

- *Brand Connectedness.* This connectedness and sense of responsibility to one another for words, actions and policies can be a powerful incentive. The brand offers each department an opportunity to see themselves and other departments within the context of a single purpose. Empowering this interaction must become even more pronounced and valued to support Elk River's competitive positioning.
 - Anything one department does or says may very well influence how a prospective customer views your City. Help each department head and employee appreciate the connectivity of what they do by using the Marketing Mix graphic.
 - Take steps to assure that departmental communication is consistently clean and lateral. Everyone needs to know what is going on and everyone needs to think about how it impacts their operations and customers.
- *Brand Speak.* Governments love complexity; customers hate it. Governments insist on government speak. The brand promise and City reputation depends upon Brand Speak. We know that many things are required by law but that doesn't mean we have to bludgeon everyone who visits the website or City Hall with "government speak."
 - *Use the powerful story-telling capacity to re-frame the City.* The compelling and authentic brand narrative, positioning and words and phrases will help you re-frame how residents see and feel about their government and how potential customers see and feel about the City as a place to live and do business.
 - *Be immediately different than your competitive cities!* Continue to grow, cultivate and nurture Elk River's competitive advantage - the up-close-and-personal approach that you can deliver which separates you from the bigger cities that interact with their customers through deep layers of bureaucracy and people.

4. Energize *The Currents*.

The City's newsletter gets high marks from residents for format and content. The title *The Currents* is a perfect fit within the brand messaging and does not require a title change. The newsletter is produced quarterly and is packed with good information. It is easy to read and written to be read. All that remains is to brand the newsletter - seed the brand language, identity, promise and reputation into every project, initiative and column.

- ***Brand The Currents.***

As the primary communication channel for the City, *The Currents* must be branded and deployed as a primary marketing tool for residents, businesses, industry clusters, community organizations and targeted commercial brokers. The newsletter will be distributed by e-mail to residents, local businesses, consumer media and target market and trade media lists assembled in the e-mail marketing tool.

- *Brand the cover page.* Underscore the energy of *The Currents* by adding the tagline under the title in the masthead; add a quote to each newsletter that solidifies the City's commitment to the brand promise.
- *Brand the articles and column.* Each of the City's initiatives can be branded to reflect the energy and power theme identified to drive the brand reputation.
 - Volunteers – *Powered by Service* can serve as the signature by-line for all the volunteer awards, recognitions, projects and activities.
 - Recreation – *Energized by Nature* can serve as the signature by-line for all the Parks & Recreation activities, projects, events and facilities.
 - Utilities – *Powered by Nature* can serve as the signature by-line to frame all the Utility initiatives, announcements and projects.
 - Conservation, Environmental – *Energized to Make a Difference* can serve as the signature by-line to frame the Project Conserve and all related conservation, waste disposal, composting and "go-green" initiatives championed by the City.
 - Advisories/Notices – *Powered by Purpose* can serve as the signature by-line to frame all the City's advisories and announcements on general policy matters.
 - Activities and Events – *Energized to Live* can serve as the signature by-line to frame all City sponsored and/or events and activities produced by other organizations and promoted by the City.

- Questions/Comments – *Powered to Connect* can serve as the signature by-line to frame the City’s comments, articles and answers to citizen questions.
- **Expand Content.** While the newsletter is packed with solid content, adding a few elements will expand its impact among the business, commercial and developer markets.
 - *Feature a business development highlight in each issue.* This can and should contain content that speaks to developers and businesses but also connect to residents with the value for enhancing quality of life or convenience.
 - *Collect content from City of Elk River sources.* All department heads and employees hear things and have stories regarding issues, comments or business-related activities.
 - *Collect stories from the business community.* Solicit stories and issues for development from your businesses, industry clusters and other community organizations as a complement to the synergy of the Elk River brand.
 - *Highlight a "set piece."* Highlight a set piece as proposed in the Editorial Calendar, in each issue. These stories will tell a piece of the Elk River story in compelling and interesting ways and introduce residents and others to the depth and scope of the energized and powerful lifestyle that lives in Elk River. This is not intended to be a history lesson but rather a focus on Elk River in the real world; use trivia and Fast Facts to help people retain the message.
 - *Feature an Elk River business or organization each month.* People love to be recognized and appreciated. Tell their stories in simple, powerful ways; use pictures of the business or organization and the owners or main characters.
 - *Use testimonials and quotes.* Personal experience and testimony is more powerful than paid advertising. Sprinkle testimonials and quotes from satisfied customers, business owners, developers throughout the newsletter and as sidebars to signature by-lines.
- **Enhance Contact.** Once databases are consolidated and made easier to access and manage, an e-mail postcard can keep Elk River top-of-mind between quarterly newsletters.
 - *Brand the postcard.* Make these messages “sing” the Elk River brand. Strong imagery, signature by-line appropriate for the message being delivered.

- *Keep it real.* Make it an easy and fast read with valuable and relevant content – special offer, new project, special event, coupons or discounts from participating retail or services.
- Market these special offer opportunities to businesses just as you do with the *Currents* newsletter.

5. Assemble a powerful database.

The quality and depth of the City's database will determine the breadth and scope of direct communication channels with target markets. It is among the most affordable and cost-effective marketing tools available to any organization. As a consequence, it deserves attention to compiling as well as maintenance.

- ***Inventory existing databases.*** In consultation with each Department Head, conduct an inventory of all available databases.
 - *Mail or E-Mail* – determine number of e-mail databases as opposed to mail databases; telephone numbers?
 - *Collection process* – how was the address obtained and for what purpose?
 - *Audit communications.* What communications are being received by these addresses currently?
 - *Is the e-mail or mail address used by any other Department?* What is the degree of cross-over between department databases?
- ***Consolidate databases.*** With the exception of the Police Department database, all Department databases should be consolidated, and segmented, to create a single, powerful, merged and purged database from which all departments can draw.
 - *Segmentation is mandatory.* The e-mail or mail address was collected by the City for a specific purpose. That being said, consolidating the database is an organizational “best practice” but it will only work effectively if time is taken to assemble the databases by segment so they can be accessed easily by segment to deliver targeted messaging to targeted audiences.
Obvious segmentation categories for Elk River would include:
 - Parks & Recreation
 - Municipal Utilities
 - EDA
 - Environment
 - Special Events
 - Business and Industry
 - Realtors
 - Community Organizations
- ***Make database management a priority.***
Databases are only as powerful as their accuracy. Legally, the “Opt-In and Out” provisions must be offered and available to everyone with whom the City communicates. This will help keep the list clean and current but it doesn't add or make changes without human contact.

- *Five Day Rule.* New e-mail addresses should be added to the database within five (5) working days of receipt. Without this commitment, addresses are lost, compromised or forgotten.
- *Twice a Year Maintenance Rule.* Ideally, the City will have a dedicated, and talented database manager working to maintain the integrity of the databases every week. If this is not the case, database management is recommended as a directed and focused project to occur at least twice a year.

- ***Build the database.***

Every City communication vehicle, event, activity, festival, gathering, forum and workshop is an opportunity to collect e-mail addresses to build a powerful communication tool.

- *Make it easy.* Add a Home Page tile for signing up for the City newsletter and special coupons and notices; produce and distribute postcards at all events and activities.
- *Sponsor an online contest for website visitors.* To collect new contacts, sponsor an Elk River Trivia Contest each month.
- *Sponsor a Currents newsletter contest.* Use the newsletter to capture new contacts by driving people to the contest posted on the website and capture the e-mails.

6. Practice Customer Relationship Management.

Effective branding and messaging depends upon consistency. The Customer Relationship Management tools are intended to help the City achieve this consistency while providing a single, affordable repository for database collection and maintenance.

- ***Consolidate to One Constant Contact Account.*** Currently, there are several Constant Contact accounts employed by different departments. This is an unnecessary expense for the City given the capacity of the program to house multiple lists affordably. It is recommended that one (1) Constant Contact account be established for the City of Elk River and consolidated under the supervision and management of the Chief Communications Manager. This insures the integrity of the database while providing easily accessed and segmented list management to Department Heads.
 - *List Segmentation.* Lists can be created and maintained (as described above) within the confines of a single Constant Contact account. This easily enables multiple list contact as well as segmented list contacts.
 - *Branded Templates and Communication Options.* Constant Contact offers the Communications Manager and Department Heads the opportunity to select and agree upon branded templates for e-communications. This reinforces the brand synergy and alerts customers to the point of origin.
 - *Analytics.* With a single Constant Contact account, the Communications Manager Can now review, track and report on all communication analytics including Open Rate, Bounces, Opt-Outs and other data which will help the City manage their communications more effectively.

7. Imbed the Brand.

In *Telling the Elk River Story* section of this Plan, we recommend that a Communications Touch Point audit be conducted to align the brand with the community opportunities. We recommend this Communications Audit be conducted in the City as well as to produce a baseline for consolidating the brand and City messaging. However, a few items are called out here as brand priorities because they deliver vital consistency and high profile to the brand mission.

- ***Speak with One Brand Voice.*** Consistency is a priority. Elk River now has the opportunity to orchestrate a single and compelling brand voice for Elk River. While we all appreciate the individuality one would like to bring to one's work, branding a City to create perception and build reputation is every City employee's business. It is absolutely essential that the brand become the "signature" of the City.
 - *Brand City vehicles.* The brand interpretation developed and provided to Elk River lends itself to a simple stencil application or static cling product application as a companion to the traditional Elk City logo. This makes it affordable and relatively easy to brand City vehicles.
 - *Brand Utility Boxes.* Neighborhood, park and business park utility boxes can be easily branded with the Elk River tagline or combination of graphic logo and tagline.
 - *Brand City Signage.* City signage is an obvious, relatively easy and very high profile way to seed the brand throughout the community quickly.
 - Audit city signage and determine where the brand can be applied immediately and with reasonable effort and investment.
 - Prioritize all city park, recreational area and facility signage, City Hall complex signage and Downtown signage.
 - Where possible, employ the stencil approach to applying the brand logo and tagline to existing signs; if new signs are proposed, add the brand logo and tagline as a companion to the traditional Elk River logo.
 - *Brand the e-Mail signatures.* Customize the City's e-mail signatures with the brand, brand tagline and an agreed upon set of quotes that reflect the City's brand promise.
 - *Brand uniforms and clothing.* The desire to identify a particular Department on a uniform or shirt is a form of identification and a comfort to a customer. It can also be a point of pride for an employee. The opportunity to combine

both motivations *and* support the City's brand identity can be achieved by re-branding the uniforms and clothing.

- As resources are available or clothing is replaced, transition to the traditional Elk River logo and the brand tagline customized for the Department:

City of Elk River: Powered by Parks & Recreation

City of Elk River: Powered by Municipal Utilities

City of Elk River: Powered by Economic Development Authority

- *Brand the City's business cards.* Apparently, there are a number of business card designs being employed by the City departments. A City's business card must reflect a singular focus on City brand building. Bring all City business cards into compliance with the traditional Elk River logo complimented by the brand tagline.
- *Eliminate individual department taglines.* Hopefully, the *Powered by Nature* community brand, and its variations described in previous sections, will satisfy the departments and their desire to describe themselves. It is important for community identity, as well as brand integrity and brand traction, that the City build its reputation on a single brand message.

8. Brand the City Publications

Elk River publishes a variety of program and project materials that are well-formatted and packed with good information. Branding them to create synergy with the City's brand and imbedding brand messaging will further root the brand messaging and help promote the City's reputation.

- **Official Community Resource & Residents Guide**

This Guide is a primary internal and external marketing tool. While well done, when the brand and brand messaging is effectively incorporated, it will take on a more prominent role in marketing the City and its character rather than just its functions and purpose.

- *Re-brand the Cover.* Incorporate the brand imaging, tagline and messaging into the cover design of the Guide to set the tone.
- *Employ signature by-lines.* Duplicate the Powered by and Energized by characteristics of the brand recommended in the *Currents* section. This builds valuable repetition and complements the tone and character of the companion publications.
- *Website, Guides from the same organization.* The City website and this Guide should be consistent in tone, imagery, energy and character. This reinforces consistency and commitment to the brand promise.

- **Recreation Guide**

Powered or Energized by Nature is a powerful brand sub-text to promote recreational activities in Elk River. As one of the most popular guides the City publishes, it can be, and should be used, as a powerful brand marketing tool.

- *Re-brand the Cover.* Incorporate brand imagery, tagline and messaging in the cover design.
- *Adopt the brand themes.* Be creative with the brand tagline and variations of the signature lines along with brand words and phrases throughout the Guide to describe and define the programs and activities in terms that reinforce the brand identity.

- **Energy City Initiatives**

Elk River had the right idea along – you are powered and energized by nature – and your energy innovations, conservation programs and environment initiatives reflect your core values. All that needs to be done to optimize the Energy City platform is re-branding: move from a noun to a verb!

- *Powered by Nature.* Re-frame the Energy City initiatives under the umbrella of: *Powered by Nature*. Describe it in terms of an overarching Elk River core value; use the strength of the double entendre to connect human potential and human capital with the natural abundance and natural resources as the fuel of innovation and quality of life.
- *Re-cast Programs.* Re-frame the inspired and innovative Project Conserve, the High Pack and the Energy City brochures in terms of direct benefit and also connecting these choices in the context of respect and appreciation for the abundance and natural beauty that makes Elk River such an extraordinary place to live and work.
- *Create consistent, benefit-heavy content.* Some of the promotional materials are vibrant, easy to read and memorable. Others are produced to list programs and convey information only. In this competitive environment, every program piece must engage, educate and encourage. Use the inherent benefits in each of these programs to influence and persuade residents and businesses to make inquiries and participate.

- **Municipal Utility Bills**

An obvious and powerful way to seed the brand is branding the Municipal Utility bills with *Powered by Nature*. This signature brand easily becomes part of the Elk River story-telling when you directly connect it to resources consumed by residents and businesses every day.

- Translate the brand into empowering residents and businesses to connect the consumption of these resources with the protection of these resources as a derivative of the natural beauty of the area that attracted them in the first place.
- Translate the platform as empowering residents and businesses to engage with conservation and recycling programs as a matter of personal benefit.
- *Powered by Nature Tip of the Month.*

9. Pump Up the City Website.

Cities across the country are now coming to recognize the power and value of their websites to engage, educate, influence, inform and promote. The website is your #1 marketing strategy and communication s channel with your primary audiences. The introduction of the new community brand provides an opportunity for the City to step back and look at their website with fresh eyes and a new “brand” perspective.

- **Website Evaluation.**

The City’s website is functional but static. It offers the basic information required but from a branding perspective does not take advantage of its opportunity to Welcome, frame the case for Elk River, influence, engage or promote.

- *Home Page.* The Home Page fails to capture and convey the character, warmth and quality of life that define Elk River. It is constructed to provide information and access to data but its static page belies the energy that characterizes Elk River and its people.
- *Navigation.* The website falls short of being *Easy, Engaging* and *Educating*. The top and left side tool bars are not sufficiently transparent to help people navigate easily.
- *Map.* A map of Elk River’s location in Minnesota is not located on the Home Page.
- *EDA.* The Economic Development Authority is not identified on either the top or left side tool bars. The EDA must be searched through first Departments and then Community Development. This vital economic development connection is neither easily located nor easily accessed.
- *Color Palette and Presentation.* Given Elk River’s natural beauty, compelling imagery is too sparse to make an immediate, favorable impression. Although the earthy color palette is appropriate for Elk River, this color scheme lacks tone, texture and dimension. dimensional.
- *Links.* Links are used to connect people with vital decision-making data. While links serve an important purpose, they cannot and should not be a substitute for framing Elk River’s strengths and assets in a compelling way. The raw data does not persuasively “make the case” for Elk River.

- ***The Website is always a Work in Progress.***

The City of Elk River must reckon with the power of the internet and how people are seeking and obtaining their information. Understanding this, the City must invest resources each year and everyday to creating and maintaining a robust, real-time website. It is a reflection of the brand identity and demonstrates the energized way of living and doing business. In this way, it becomes a daily commitment to the brand promise.

- ***Stake a claim to "brand" urls.***

Protect all the urls that reflect the Elk River brand. Some will be used by the City, some will be ascribed to Elk River brand channels or just prevent others from using them or abusing them. Purchase rights to all domain names in .com; .net; and .org.

- The url derivations with the city name "Elk River" are all available. The tagline or brand urls are available in some format but not all. Some, like *poweredbynature.com* are considered "premium" domain names, meaning a company purchased it to re-sell at a higher price. We recommend these be purchased in the .net and .org formats now.

- poweredbyelkriver
- poweredbynature
- poweredbyelkrivermn
- energizedbynature
- energizedbyelkriver
- energizedbyelkrivermn
- elkriverpoweredbynature
- elkriverenergizedbynature
- erpoweredbynature

- ***Develop more transparent and brand-oriented tool bars.***

The brand platform gives the City an opportunity re-frame their role as a facilitator of life in Elk River. While there are many examples of transparency in website navigation, the Milwaukee, WI. website illustrates the benefits of crafting the navigational tools to reflect "customer speak" versus "government speak. These tools make exploring and engaging with the City website easier and more productive and strengthen Elk River's commitment to delivering on the brand promise.

<http://city.milwaukee.gov/home>

- **Check out award-winning City websites for inspiration.**

While many changes can be made in-house to both incorporate the brand and enhance website capacity, a new or re-designed website will ultimately be a competitive advantage for Elk River. However, this Plan recommends an immediate focus on employing the brand and brand messaging to achieve a more approachable, welcoming and easily navigated website that will help Elk River compete more effectively. This being said, following are some award-winning examples of city websites that meet all the “best practices” for website development and reflect the character of the community.

City of North Port North Port, FL



City of Enid Enid, OK



- ***Brand the Home Page.***

The Home Page is your 24/7 *Open for Business* face to the world! It needs to convey the energy and character that drives Elk River to achieve and sustains your powerful alliance with nature.

- *Strengthen the Home Page with some powerful imagery and brand messaging.* Incorporate the brand tagline and stronger imagery. Make a statement about who and what you are and what you value. Use the brand positioning statement as a platform for welcoming visitors to the City site.
- *Make it Easy and Engaging.* Take the customer's view of your website and re-calibrate the top and side tool bars to be more transparent and accessible.
- *Imbed a locator map.* Use the Minnesota map as an opportunity to highlight Elk River's enviable location.
- *Warm-up the color palette.* Update the palette to a more dimensional color palette that highlights Elk River's water features, seasons, wooded hills, neighborhoods and Downtown amenities.
- *Add an Economic Development tab.* Add a navigational tab for the Economic Development Authority on both the top and left side tool bars. Don't make potential customers search for this vital development connection.

- ***Enhance and Strengthen the Brand Messaging on Jump Pages.***

The Home Page sets the tone and starts the story-telling. The navigational tool bar takes the website visitor to the information they are seeking. The Elk River story must continue on these pages for the message to be delivered and believed.

- *Continue the story-telling.* Department introductions and lead-in paragraphs need to frame the department's role, mission and commitment to customers AND reflect pieces of the story-telling narrative that best exemplify that mission. Examples have been suggested for branding department content in the City's newsletter *Currents* and these can easily be adapted as the story-telling platform on the website as well.

10. Speak with One Social Media Voice

While the enthusiasm for social media among City Departments is to be applauded, too many social media channels will actually diminish and detract from the strength of your brand voice and messaging. As we have already noted earlier, the Elk River brand voice will be better served if the City Departments collaborate and synchronize their messaging to develop and execute a synergistic and integrated communications plan of action.

- **Conduct a social media audit.**

Currently there are five (5) Elk River Facebook pages and four (4) Twitter accounts. Conduct a communications audit. This audit is intended to measure the synergy between and among the channels, the consistency of the messaging and the Elk River brand strength.

- Using the following audit checklist, determine the strength of the Elk River voice:
 - ☐ City of Elk River as primary service or product provider
 - ☐ Presence of common logo elements
 - ☐ Presence of common design elements
 - ☐ Presence of common Elk River descriptive terms
 - ☐ Presence of consistent messaging formats
 - ☐ "Pitching" or informing and dialoguing tactics
 - ☐ Presence of common call to action
 - ☐ Presence of Elk River brand voice (before brand is implemented, this implies a commitment to promote Elk River first and then the specific Department or activity/event)

- **Align social media goals with brand goals.**

With the audit in hand, the Departments will begin the process of aligning their individual goals with those of the brand – to build and sustain a strong identity and reputation for Elk River. This requires putting the City of Elk River front and center, framing their imagery and messaging as part of the story-telling team and reinforcing their role in Elk River's identity by incorporating brand messaging.

- *Consolidate the individual department Facebook pages.* The compilation and strength of this combined content and outreach will produce a more powerful brand platform, easier to monitor and manage and generate a better following.

- **Assign development of a social media plan to the Chief Communications Manager.**

Working with the Department Heads, the Communications Manager will collect communications goals and motivations, frame the communications with consistent brand messaging, integrate cross-channel strategies and recognize cross-marketing opportunities.

- *Coordinate with Brand Navigators Social Media Plan.* Wherever there is opportunity to reinforce, support or cross-market with a Brand Navigator branding goal, the City should become a major player.
- *Coordinate with the City's master editorial calendar.* Bringing synergy to the brand messaging is best achieved by using the master editorial calendar as the baseline and then launching a collection of supportive department and brand messaging around it.
- *Monitor the multiple Twitter accounts.* If multiple Twitter accounts are maintained, the Communications Manager must provide oversight, monitoring for brand consistency, messaging and brand integrity.
- **Brand the Discover Elk River Facebook page.**
Re-brand the *Discover Elk River* Facebook page to reflect the brand: *Powered by Elk River*. This reinforces the strength of the marketing platform and establishes the platform for connecting Elk River with all good things energy and power.

VI. The Brand as Economic Development Authority Platform.

It can reasonably be said that in the 21st century every city in the United States is competing globally not cities in a region or other country. This is said not rather to magnify the adapt to a new

To be competitive in relevant ways that bring value to your customers – residents, existing businesses and potential new developer and business customers.

just with neighboring cities across this to overwhelm but necessity for cities to imperative:

The *Powered by Nature* brand identity offers the Economic Development Authority an unparalleled opportunity to build reputation and power-up their economic development program to gain greater traction among targeted customers. Being competitive today requires a holistic and comprehensive approach to positioning and marketing. The strength of the community brand provides that platform.

Strategy: To empower the Economic Development Authority to build, sustain and promote the City's reputation and grow its influence to positively impact the business and community goals compatible with Elk River's brand promise and Vision.

Tactics

1. Align the Brand with the EDA Goals.

Because the Elk River brand is all about building a reputation for Elk River, the brand is a powerful platform upon which to launch and sustain a focused and consistently delivered customer-centric, economic development experience to commercial brokers, realtors and developers. Deciding how this brand translates into the way the EDA does business is a critical decision for reputation-building. It touches on the operating principles and protocols that your staff employs every day as well as external marketing. A genuine customer-centric organization does not just happen – it is led and nurtured. The brand offers you the opportunity to re-invent the EDA to align with and translate the brand promise as an operating principle.

- ***Build the Brand Culture.***

Build a brand culture that says: "*We are Elk River: Powered by Nature.*" Our brand promise is how we speak, work and interact every day. Our only job is to make and keep customers for Elk River.

- *What is your staff saying?* Take the time to know what your staff is saying and how they are interacting with customers. Walk around, observe and listen. What brand messaging are they employing on a daily basis? How are they describing Elk River as a place to do business? How are they interacting with the customers? Use this valuable information to introduce customer-centric attitudes and preferred brand messaging.
- *Engage your staff in "branding" Elk River.* Take the time to roll-out brand and Plan with your team. Engage staff in a discussion about the Plan's purpose and objectives. Describe the brand process, platform and tagline. Discuss proposed customer-centric strategies and tactics. At every step, ask for their perspective and opinions about how best to implement. Listen. Take notes.
- *Give staff an opportunity to contribute in other ways.* Encourage staff to contribute their suggestions for enhancing or changing your customer experience consistent with the brand promise in an e-mail or conversation outside the public forum. Asking for staff to think about options, alternatives and solutions all year will sharpen everyone's focus and empower staff to be fully engaged in the process of delivering a consistent customer experience that flexes with the circumstances and economic environment.
- *Set specific, clear expectations.* Once everyone is knowledgeable about the brand and expectations, after they have contributed their insights and perspectives, after they have been trained or coached in brand messaging and service delivery – make these practices real. Set specific and clear expectations for them to perform to – not occasionally – but every day. Incorporate these expectations for how business is to be conducted in the Job Descriptions and review process.

- ***Align your Processes and Protocols to Reflect the Brand.***

Powered by Nature is an authentic brand. That means Elk River can deliver on this brand promise today. It also suggests responsibility and aspiration. Now is the time to review and evaluate your existing forms and processes to bring into alignment with the brand promise. Elk River must prove itself to be “powered” in words and actions.

- *Start with one question:*
Is this a customer-friendly form or process or a city-friendly form or process?
- *Challenge the “we have always done it this way” approach to form and process.* Conduct an audit of your forms and view them from a customer perspective. Ask actual customers to critique the forms and processes. *What is duplicative? What is really necessary for city decision-making? What makes people shake their heads? What can you eliminate? Are the lines actually long enough for a name and company? Are grids and signing lines proportionate to the information being required?*
- *Push everything you can online.* This is a “best practice” recommended and available at some of the country’s leading Economic Development Organizations. While Elk River has many forms online, they must be printed out and completed manually. This tactic recommends that the forms are available for online completion and submission with the addition of a secure payment software. This will save time and money for staff *and* for those making the submissions. While an in-person visit may still be required, online submission would give staff time to review the documents, make notes about questions to ask and be better prepared to manage the in-person meeting more efficiently and effectively. Staff could also communicate with customers in advance of their in-person visit to advise them of missing information or additional information required before they make the trip.

2. Cultivate Champions for Elk River and the Brand.

The Elk River brand and the Elk River EDA depends on champions beyond City Hall. Get to know your major company owners and managers better for several reasons: they are more likely to be the front-line salespeople for Elk River because of the associations and business organizations with which they are engaged; they are potential brand partners and influencers; and Elk River should be the first to know if a company is thinking of expanding or relocating.

- **Create a profile on each first tier business owner.**

Go beyond the name, address and telephone. Learn who they are, what they value, their family, take the time to ask about their business and the nuances of their business, and their plans for the future. This ground work will improve relationships, provide you with information necessary to work better with them, help them grow and expand and provide you with clues that may ward off unexpected relocation challenges.

- **Aspire to take your customer service level to a customer experience level.**

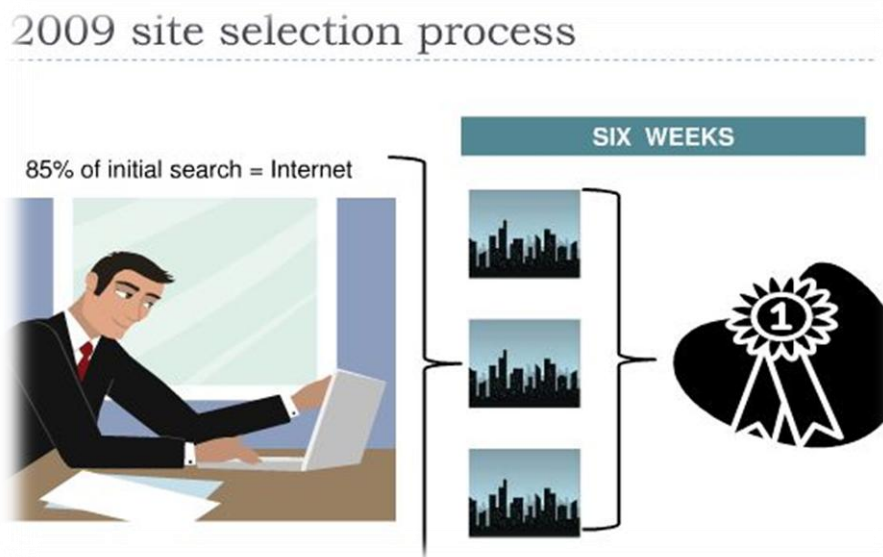
Direct staff with tracking customer comments and remarks. Collect e-mails from all your customers. Construct a simple, online survey instrument and send it off to them within ten days of their visit or contact with the City. Use this same e-mail database to communicate with monthly e-postcards or quarterly newsletters.

<http://www.constantcontact.com/online-surveys/index.jsp>

- **Make it the "company" business.** Build into your work schedule, regular outings and opportunities to interface with the people who can help you "sell" Elk River.
 - *Network.* Use networking and Chamber events as opportunities to interact with and promote the city and the brand within the context of benefits for the business owner.
 - *In-person visits.* Plan your monthly schedule by including a visit with one or two industry and business leaders on their turf or over coffee or lunch each month. Listen, take good notes, ask questions and educate at every opportunity.
 - *Recruit other Department Heads.* Ask other Department Heads to schedule business visits or Downtown walk-about and report back comments, issues or problems.
 - Debrief at the start of each Management Meeting and ask the question: *What did we learn from our customers last week? What are we doing about it?* This keeps the team focused on what really matters – making and keeping customers for Elk River and increasing the odds that they speak well of Elk River!

3. Launch a Powerful EDA Website Brand for Elk River.

Elk River must be an Economic Development competitor. And most Economic Development Organizations have their own robust, content-rich websites. Potential site selectors, commercial real estate agents and brokers, developers and investors are routinely screening cities online. If a city wants to be considered, that city must have a strong presence on the internet and provide an easily navigated and informative website. You must be communicating in real time with a strong and compelling message. You must be giving customers the information they want while framing it to showcase Elk River's strengths. The necessity to consistently brand the messaging and dedicate time, creativity and resources to the development of the EDA website is best illustrated with this research and graphic:



- **Design and launch an EDA website.**

Brand the new website and make it a powerful competitive agent for Elk River. The strength of the brand platform, Elk River's ability and capacity to deliver on the brand promise and the current and enhanced arsenal of incentives and programs will prove to be a compelling package.

- Take inspiration from effective EDO sites. Award-winning websites are judged so by their users. These Economic Development Organization (EDO) websites are not expensive nor are they elaborate. But they get the job done and express the city or regional brand very compellingly.

<http://www.sbrda.org/>

<http://www.tinleypark.org/votp.asp?ctp=ed/content.asp>

<http://www.indypartnership.com/>

<http://www.cullmaneda.org/>

- ***Develop the right website tools.***

Re-design the website so that its architecture, navigation, content, data and engagement factor meet today's expectations. This website must be branded to herald and champion the Elk River messaging as a framework for Elk River's identity and competitive positioning.

- *Adopt the Right Navigation Tools.* This research and chart makes the case for developing your Economic Development website to reflect what customers need and want most. Site selectors, developers and commercial brokers and real estate agents want to know who they are working with, what incentives are available (if any), a reliable and descriptive data center, development and business news, and relocation, expansion and property opportunities lead the list. And they don't want to work too hard to access it! Get these navigational tabs and pages right!

Top 10 Page Requests on Economic Development Websites:

1. About Us
2. Programs (Incentives)
3. Data Center
4. News
5. Relocation & Expansion
6. Find Property
7. Site Selection Services
8. Workforce Profile and Information
9. Companies and Largest Employers
10. Maps of Area

- About Us. Tell the Elk River story through the people that can make it happen. Beyond contacts, tell the website visitor how you and your team bring the brand promise to life everyday: *empowered to coordinate and facilitate; inspired by the balance of energy and nature; the strength of compatible business with a high quality of life.*
- Incentives & Programs. Don't just list and recite incentives and programs – promote them as the strategic and beneficial assets they are. Frame them as branded programs intended to foster a compatible balance and achieve sustainability while offering direct benefit to business: *incentives crafted to welcome and encourage compatible businesses to locate in Elk River allows us to influence the unique and enviable quality of life in Elk River.*

- **Build a Compelling Home Page**

The EDA homepage is your first impression and advertisement for economic development opportunities in Elk River. It sets the tone and expectation. In addition to branding these pages, Elk River must use the brand to create and deliver a more compelling and engaging first impression. Load it with high octane imagery, powerful key words and compelling stories that make the case for Elk River. Don't let data speak for itself – use every opportunity to connect the dots, build Elk River's identity and stimulate interest among potential customers.

- **Home Page Sample: Elk River logo, brand logo and tagline and map of Elk River in Minnesota.**

Powered by Nature.

For people who want to breathe the outdoors but want access to big city amenities, Elk River is an active community at the convergence of the Elk and Mississippi Rivers and at the fringe of the Twin Cities, where its heart is powered by its nature so you feel energized and inspired to make a difference.

Elk River is the business address of choice for (list major companies.) The reason? Location, accessibility, incentives and programs, workforce, lifestyle, affordability - and a powerful commitment to seeking and sustaining compatible businesses that naturally inspire our quality of life and strengthen a productive business environment.

Powered by Nature is more than a brand. It defines our character and how we do business. It reflects our core values and how we live. And it showcases our ability to balance business and quality of life better than anyone else in the region!

Elk River invites you to take advantage of this unique proposition – come get Powered by Nature!

- **Home Page Copy blocks and or Jump Pages...**

Powered by Location! *Strategic location takes on new meaning when used in the same sentence as Elk River. Located just 30 miles west of Twin Cities and at the confluence of Highways 10 and 169 at a bend in the mighty Mississippi River...[click here for more...](#)*

Page Contents:

- ✓ Map of Elk River
- ✓ Map of Elk River in proximity to Twin Cities, County, State of Minnesota and USA
- ✓ Highways
- ✓ Northstar Rail

Energized by our Workforce! *The residents of Elk River are proud, smart and hard-working. They bring a wealth of skills and experience to the workplace. But that's just the beginning of our workforce story. Elk River's location provides an additional benefit to businesses and employers – our proximity to neighboring communities and the Twin Cities offers easy access to a skilled and educated workforce living within an hour's commute. [click here for more...](#)*

Page Contents:

- ✓ Workforce profile of Elk River
- ✓ Workforce profile of Sherburne County and Twin Cities
- ✓ Workforce profile within one hour of Elk River

Powered by Accessibility! *Ask any of our industries and business owners. An easily accessed convergence of highways and rail lines complemented by a strategic proximity to Twin Cities, middle America and the east and west coast makes the moving of people, goods and services easy, convenient, affordable...and possible. [click here for more...](#)*

Page Contents:

- ✓ Map of highway locations from Elk River's center point
- ✓ Actual distances from a center point
- ✓ Travel time low, high and norm traffic hours
- ✓ Northstar Rail map

Energized by Business & Industry! *Elk River is home to (list companies) for good reason – they were influenced by the competitive advantages and inspired to innovative and prosper by the environment. This natural attraction creates a vitality and energy valued by all who live and work in Elk River. [click here for more...](#)*

Page Contents:

- ✓ List of businesses by industry clusters
- ✓ List of retailers (chain and independent)
- ✓ Downtown map and business listing

Powered by Innovation! *Elk River is the epicenter for innovation. With one of the original hydro energy producing dams and plants, over twenty five (25) energy efficient and economically feasible projects and demonstration sites, the original GRE Power Plant, Project Conserve and the Minnesota's Energy City designation, Elk River is an environment naturally inspired by its abundant resources, talent and opportunity. [click here for more...](#)*

Page Contents:

- ✓ Re-branded Energy City programs

Energized by Affordability! *Known for its affordable and competitive lease rates for light industrial space, retail and services space and light industrial commercial properties, as well as the best and most competitive utility and tax rates in Minnesota, Elk River offers the start-up or relocating business maximum benefit. [click here for more...](#)*

Page Contents:

- ✓ Comparison of Lease Rates Elk River to Twin Cities
- ✓ Comparison of Lease Rates Elk River to Minnesota Extract or Other Primary Competitive Cities
- ✓ Comparison of Parcel Sales Rates in Elk River to Twin Cities
- ✓ Comparison of Parcel Sales Rates in Elk River to Minnesota Extract or Other Competitive Cities
- ✓ Competitive Tax Rate Chart (actually do the math for an average business – expenses for utilities, business taxes, sales taxes etc. in comparison to primary competitive cities)

Powered by Incentives! *Elk River draws energy from the strength of their companies and businesses. And our incentive package proves the point. The Elk River EDA has built an arsenal of incentives, tools and programs to help businesses expand, grow, relocate and thrive. [click here for more...](#)*

Page Contents:

- ✓ Re-branded Business Finance Tool Kit

Elk River is Energized by Vision and Powered by Purpose!

Elk River derives its Vision and Purpose from our determination to create and grow a community in balance with our nature. We are strong and working to be stronger. [click here for more...](#)

Page Contents:

- ✓ Copies of Studies and Plans supporting projects underway
- ✓ Project Renderings
- ✓ Planning & Zoning Methodology
- ✓ Planning & Zoning Maps
- ✓ Opportunities
- ✓ Contacts

The Elk River Brand Navigators. *The Elk River Brand Navigators is the newest addition to Elk River's arsenal of business tools. Organized to lead and manage Elk River's brand identity and reputation, this group represents a powerful cross-section of public and private partners engaged in promoting and marketing Elk River as a place to do business and live. [click here for more...](#)*

Page Contents

- ✓ Brand Navigators Business Contacts
- ✓ The Elk River Story: Brand One-Pager
- ✓ Programs for Existing Businesses
- ✓ Programs for Prospective Businesses
- ✓ Resources (Local, State, Federal)
- ✓ Financing Opportunities (Banks, Venture Capital and Angel Networks)

Elk River is Powered by Nature!

Elk River's commitment to business and quality of life converge at every turn. It is literally in our nature to seek and nurture compatible partnerships with those who are inspired to make a difference. It is the driving force behind our incentives, business programs, community actions and at the heart of our commitment to residents and business leadership. [click here for more...](#)

Page Contents:

- ✓ What business Can expect: working with the City Administrator, EDA, and City Council
- ✓ Chamber
- ✓ Public Safety FAQs
- ✓ Public Works
- ✓ Neighborhoods
- ✓ Transportation
- ✓ Education
- ✓ Quality of Life: parks, programs, recreation, festivals

4. Build Up Inventory & Project Pages

The Home Page and Benefits described above are the “front door” and introduction to Elk River’s economic development opportunities. But the inside pages are where you want your website visitor to “live” for awhile. The objective is to keep the visitor on your site longer – to educate, inform, engage and incite to a positive action. So, using the Elk River brand language, narrative, imagery and values, make these pages, the strongest statement you can make for Elk River.

- ***Create an Available Inventory Page.***

Brand Elk River as the “powerbroker” it must be to nurture an aggressive, targeted economic development agenda. Some of the profiles, like the Northstar and Gateway Center profiles, are more substantive than others. Depending upon commercial brokers and realtors to list and describe the commercial properties in Elk River is inadequate.

- List all available commercial properties, retail and office space, industrial sites and parcels. Include property and parcel photos for each and at least the following basic data:
 - Property or Parcel Specifications
 - Broker or Agent Name, Phone and E-Mail
 - Zoning and/or Restrictions
 - Preferred or Previous Use
- The International Economic Development Council (IEDC) offers the most comprehensive guide to effective economic development marketing featuring what site selectors, commercial brokers and potential owners are expecting when visiting an Economic Development website. Use these “best practices” and tools when designing this section of the EDA website.

http://www.iedconline.org/?p=Data_Standards

- ***Translate the Workforce Page.***

It is not enough to just provide the data and statistics. Elk River needs to interpret this data and brand it to Elk River’s advantage. This page must showcase the workforce profiles and skills available for Elk River as well as other communities, including Twin Cities, within one hour’s commute. This will provide site selectors with a much more comprehensive perspective on the workforce available.

- ***Translate the Demographics Page.***

As with the workforce profile, Elk River’s demographics require interpretation. And the brand helps you frame the residents of Elk River in relevant terms to business: consumers and workers.

- **Showcase Elk River's Industry Clusters.**

This is Elk River's opportunity to BRAG about the businesses and primary industry clusters that are flourishing in Elk River. Like is attracted to like. Make the case that these industries prosper in Elk River and come join us!

- **Power Up Downtown Imagery.**

Elk River must engage the services of a photographic "artist" who can see and capture attractive and inviting images of Downtown. This enhanced portfolio of downtown views, architectural features, spatial qualities, streetscaping and amenities will be used to frame the Downtown opportunity and encourage site selectors and investors.

- **Make It Personal.**

Nothing speaks as loud and as convincingly as testimonials from real business people doing business successfully in Elk River.

- Collect testimonials from established industries and companies of all sizes doing business in Elk River. Ask them to focus on their successes, the advantages of locating in Elk River and the benefits of working with the City.
- Rotate these testimonials throughout the pages of the website. Include pictures of the owner/manager.
- Refresh these testimonials with new businesses and comments collected at events and meetings.

- **Next Stage: Install GIS mapping software.**

Site selectors and developers are gravitating toward the online GIS mapping software quickly. This follows the propensity for time-saving, online site searches. Make it easy for your prospective clients to learn about Elk River and your available properties and parcels. The GIS software allows a customer to "experience" the community in a site-specific way that encourages exploration and keeps the customer engaged on the site. There are several resources for GIS software, two are provided here for your consideration:

<http://slp.pbinsight.com/info/mipro-sem-us-b?qclid=CP-ewtrMmqgCFRNrgwodqBLrHg>

<http://www.agridatainc.com/?qclid=CPf0guvMmqgCFRphgwodDDuGGQ>

- *Be the first in Sherburne County!* The link below illustrates the counties in Minnesota using this software technology.
http://publicrecords.onlinesearches.com/MN_Sherburne.htm

5. Target Economic Development Messaging.

The brand platform and promise provides the Elk River Economic Development Authority powerful positioning and marketing language to influence target markets. While the EDA goals and industry cluster target markets are well defined, this tactic reminds the EDA what commercial brokers and agents, site selectors and developers are looking for when searching for communities. How to communicate with each should drive your marketing emphasis when crafting website and marketing materials.

- **Commercial Property Realtors and Brokers**

These are the frontline sales team for Elk River properties and parcels. The agents and brokerages represent properties and parcels available for sale or lease.

- **Messaging.** This target market will respond to an Elk River brand message that provides them with the tactical advantages and reliable data they need to present an accurate and compelling sales proposition.
 - Make certain that each operating real estate agent or broker receives a copy of the Economic Development positioning statements and propositions suggested for the EDA website.
 - Arm this market with real-time data on development progress and infrastructure plans and progress that influence the environment in which their properties are located.
 - Deliver progress reports about Downtown, business parks and projects.
 - Provide grant and loan programs they can use as client incentives.

- **Developers**

Real estate development or Property Development ranges from the renovation and re-leasing of existing buildings to the purchase of land and the sale of improved land or parcels to others. Developers are generally thought of as the facilitators of a vision rather than the builders, although some developers do have construction subsidiaries. Developers buy land, finance real estate deals and build or have builders build projects and obtain the necessary public approval.

- **Messaging** This market responds to messages framed in terms of opportunity, money and ease – financing and ROI. Developers want to know if this is a good opportunity, how easy or hard it will be to develop, lease and manage, how easy it will be to work their plans through the City, how easy will it be to get the financing and how easy will it be to get the deal done.

- Provide developers with the baseline data they need about Elk River to make a preliminary decision to site visit. Frame the data in brand terms – its culture, people, traffic, density, buying habits and sense of community.
- Position Elk River as the City that gets the deals done – personal attention, fast track processing and minimal bureaucracy.
- Feature incentives, rebates or partnership.
- Bring testimonial to the table – work with industry leaders in the City to speak with the developers and provide first hand advocacy.

- **Site Selectors**

Site selectors are responsible for identifying and choosing the optimal location for a business based on accessibility to and availability of customers as well as considerations such as space costs, size, and other physical characteristics, zoning regulations, investment tax credits, and the quality of the available workforce. Sophisticated computer modeling tools can be used to evaluate site alternatives based on the number and characteristics of consumers in each prospective location

- **Messaging** This market needs to deliver for his/her boss. They are armed with a specific set of criteria for the site search. Deviating too much from this direction is a risk. Elk River must listen or read carefully and equate the site selector's criteria as precisely as possible with what Elk River can deliver.
 - Selectors are influenced first and foremost by what they see and hear. Elk River must cultivate local champions who will speak well of the City and sustain a robust communications initiative to influence word-of-mouth, create good "buzz" in the marketplace and
 - Looking for incentives is their next priority. Elk River can compete here but powering up the incentive package will improve your odds.
 - Site selectors do their preliminary searches online. The Elk River brand initiatives and a robust EDA website will greatly enhance Elk River's positioning.

6. Consolidate and Strengthen your “Natural Resources”

Not the Elk River woods or hills but the influence of the Elk River Brand Navigators. These are the people who are interacting with the wider business and organizational community every day. These are the people who can influence a decision by a site selector, developer or commercial broker with a single word and testimony! These are the people who can cultivate and generate a brand narrative throughout the community and outside the community with their networking and contacts. So, put them to work cultivating the word-of-mouth and brand extensions that will underscore and support Elk River’s economic development strategy using the Elk River brand as a powerful platform.

- ***Powered to Succeed.***

Create Industry Cluster Coalitions & Councils. There are challenges facing the whole region as well as the City; there are challenges facing specific businesses and industries. Ask your private sector business partners to become part of the solution. The practical, idea-generating capacity of the private sector combined with the experience and resourcefulness of the public sector makes a formidable incubator for solutions and results in a sense of ownership.

- *Focus on Priorities.* Invite your business community to work with the City to define the issues and propose solutions, alternatives and options. Ask them to be part of the solution. Start with at least three (3) time-dated Task Forces (60-90 days) to discuss and propose solutions to a number of pressing issues articulated during the course of these interviews:
 - *Downtown Evolution*
 - *Industry Cluster Development*
 - *Gateway Signage*
- *Build Partnerships.* Create a productive working relationship with these Task Forces and Councils so that the City reaps the benefits of :
 - Improved perception of the City and Elk River as a place to do business.
 - Collecting front line ground intelligence and good advice.
 - Nurturing positive word of mouth to influence prospective customers.
 - Coalitions and partnerships that will help the City market itself.
- *Value-Added Asset.* Protect and promote the value of the Task Forces and Councils as value-added assets to economic development.
 - Market their work to all businesses and the realtor and developer community. Market their work as an asset and business advantage.
 - Talk about the Council and Task Force findings and recommendations in the proposed Newsletter.
 - Send the Task Force and Council recommendations out with a Survey to the appropriate audiences so the business community can weigh in conveniently.

7. Get Closer to the Realtors

Realtors are out selling and representing properties and parcels in Elk River every day. And the realtors in Elk River are proud and determined. Their contribution to the 365 Things to Do in Elk River is proof of their support. So, optimize this energy and commitment and cultivate regional and national commercial property relationships to strengthen Elk River's awareness.

- ***Get them aboard with strong brand messaging.***

Local realtors and commercial brokers are out there every day. Do you know what they are saying? How they are positioning Elk River? Do they have all the facts? And equally important, do you know what their prospective customers are saying about Elk River?

- *Make realtors priority partners.* Provide them a Brand Messaging package and encourage them to incorporate the Elk River brand and brand messaging in everything they and their staff do and say. This will be among the most effective and affordable frontline sales crew you can have working for Elk River.

- ***Host a twice yearly Elk River Energized Realtors Roundtable.***

Invite all the realtors and developers currently engaged in selling and marketing properties and parcels in Elk River or thinking of developing property in Elk River. Make it worth their time and travel by loading it with relevant and real-time information that they can use to more effectively market your properties.

- *Power-packed Program.* Plan 90 minutes for the event and use the following format as a guideline to keep it engaging, fun and informative:
 - 30 minutes of social networking over a light breakfast
 - 30 minutes of City and private sector updates on developments, plans, incentive programs and improvements throughout the City
 - 30 minutes for comments, questions and answers
 - Offer a guided tour of projects and development sites.
- *Make it fun and memorable!* Because these people will talk to others in their industry. Send them home with a positive and energized perspective of Elk River.
 - Identify a friendly realtor to help you co-host the event – high energy and enthusiasm required!
 - Invite the Mayor, Council and City Administrator to participate – this will make a good impression.
 - Collect gift certificates and trip vouchers for drawings.
 - Decorate the tables with Elk River Brand Navigators logos/tagline signage, postcards with the Elk River story and incentives.
 - Enlarge photos of Elk River properties and parcels; renderings of developments and Elk River Brand Navigators programs.
 - Invite business and industry clusters to exhibit at the event.

- ***Make commercial property realtors in Minnesota a "Target Market."***

Make these people your allies! Make certain they receive your monthly newsletter and have access to the most accurate and current data about Elk River developments, incentives and plans; available storefronts and commercial properties and parcels in Elk River.

- Loop Net: <http://www.loopnet.com/Minnesota-Commercial-Real-Estate/>
- City Feet: <http://www.cityfeet.com/MinnesotaCommercialRealEstateLocal/MinnesotaCommercialRealEstate.aspx>
- Minnesota Commercial Realtors Assn.: <http://www.mncar.org/>
- Calhoun Companies: <http://www.calhouncompanies.com/>
- Commercial: <http://www.commercialiq.com/commercialrealestate/minnesota>
- CIMLS: http://www.cimls.com/location_review/minnesota-commercial-real-estate.htm
- Co-Star: http://www.costar.com/?src=ppcg_Costar2_G-CoStar_CommRealEstate&LID=sGpcOopGT_pcrd_3994890250
- Showcase: http://www.showcase.com/?src=ppcg_State_MINNESOTA_CommMN&LID=srMyhrWIF_pcrd_3651140768
- MetroMSP: <http://www.metromsp.org/>
- Minnesota Site: <http://www.mnprospector.com/>

- ***Host an Annual Commercial Realtor/Developer/Investor FAM Event.***

Familiarization trips have been used for decades to help cities showcase their assets. Elk River needs to invite those in the real estate/developer community who do not know Elk River to their City - and show it off!

- *Elk River Energized.* Plan the half day event during the Spring or Fall when the weather is most favorable and coincide the FAM date with a well-executed Elk River community event. A community event helps you entertain and engage the attendees in authentic ways and provides them a flavor of the community.

- Invite realtors located throughout Minnesota to get energized” with an Elk River power-packed half day showcase of the City’s best development and real estate opportunities.
- Arrange for a comfortable, air conditioned coach to transport attendees from site to site; select a well-informed “step-on” guide to describe the route, talk about what is happening in Elk River and describe the parcels or properties available.
- Develop an itinerary that features prime parcels, development sites and Downtown opportunities. Integrate the abundant natural resources and lifestyle amenities that distinguish Elk River. Include visits with prominent business owners who will provide testimony for Elk River as a place to do business.
- Host a breakfast and lunch at local restaurants or cater at the River’s Edge Commons. Arrange for an Elk River booster as a lunch speaker.
- Create a “branded” Elk River Brand Navigators portfolio for attendees to include a map of the sites to be visited and brief narratives of each site including zoning, specs and proposed opportunities; Elk River incentives; current newsletter; Welcome Letter from the Mayor and City Manager; complete list of all the properties available in Elk River and contacts.
- Make up branded take-away tote bags. Include branded merchandise and collect locally crafted or manufactured gifts and goodies from local businesses.
- Offer attendees a gas card pre-loaded with the equivalent of a tank of gas to encourage their travel to and from Elk River.

8. Build Targeted Industry and Trade Media Databases.

The commercial realtor and broker websites identified in this section are first priority for communicating Elk River's economic development opportunities. In addition to listing properties, they publish content about cities, properties and incentive packages. These sites are used by real estate agents, site selectors, developers and researchers in the market. They should be the cornerstone of your online media outreach to the commercial property marketplace.

- ***Feed content and load Elk River properties and parcels.***

This list of industry and trade media magazines, newsletters and online sites will give Elk River a good start on raising their profile in the commercial real estate marketplace.

- When listings for properties are FREE, load all the Elk River properties and include pictures and specifications. This improves Elk River's SEO for your website and raises Elk River's profile in this arena – not to mention, it casts a wider net for prospective customers.
- Send all Elk River press releases and newsletters to these sources. Your information will not always be used but it will always make an impression. This impression begins the process of creating a higher profile for your economic development activity and Elk River as a serious contender for site selection.

9. Launch an Online presence.

The brand will greatly enhance and empower the City's economic development initiative to influence consideration. Online advertising will take it to the next level. In fact, most economic development organizations and companies are shifting a higher percentage of their advertising budget to online marketing. While a banner ad on top realtor or developer websites is desirable, a robust Pay Per Click program helps the City of Elk River and the EDA play with the big boys very affordably.

- ***Pay Per Click.***

While there are hundreds of Pay Per Click Search Engines from which you can buy internet traffic, the biggest and best producing volume, traffic quality and user interface is GoogleAdWords. Others for inspection and future consideration include Yahoo! Search Marketing, MSN AdCenter, MIVA, SearchFeed, Marchex AdHere, ABCSearch and 7Search.

- AdWords ads are displayed along with search results when someone searches Google using one of your keywords. That way, you'll be advertising to an audience that's already interested in Elk River, Sherburne County and/or Minnesota or the region. You can choose the exact content placements where you'd like your ad to appear, or you can let [contextual targeting](#) match your keywords to content. You can choose from a variety of ad formats, including text, image, and video ads, and easily track your ad performance using the reports available in your account. There are many advantages to this form of advertising:
 - It is precisely targeted. Your ad only shows up on the page when a customer is searching for something that matches the keywords you select.
 - You control and manage the pay per click amount you are willing to pay for each Click Thru. Estimated average Click Thru rates range from a low of \$.05 to a high of \$3.00 for most of the keywords recommended for this program. You decide what the value is for a Retail searcher as opposed to a Commercial or Developer searcher.
- You control the monthly budget allocated to support this advertising. It is recommended that you sustain a specific monthly budget for all twelve months and experiment with demand using Google Analytics and the measurement and marketing tools provided free of charge with the program.
 - Start with a modest investment of \$500.00 - \$750.00 per month in this program. This will net you a sufficient number of prospects and leads to justify the expenditure.

- Increase the budget after an analysis of peak search month history. If more site selection searches occur in the spring months, increase the budget in those months.
- **Select the "right keywords."**
The GoogleAdWords Keyword Tool is an amazing tool from which to generate keyword ideas and see what the competition values. This makes keyword selection easy.
 - *Baseline keywords.* Compile baseline keyword combinations to drive qualified traffic. Research conducted during Plan development will narrow the search parameters to deliver a more targeted prospective client:
 - *Elk River, MN Economic Development*
 - *Elk River, MN Properties Available*
 - *Elk River, MN Commercial Properties Available*
 - *Elk River, MN Commercial Real Estate*
 - *Elk River Industrial Property*
 - *Elk River Retail Properties for Sale*
 - *Elk River Retail Properties for Lease*
 - *Elk River Commercial Property (ies)*
 - *Elk River business property*
 - *Commercial Property in Elk River, MN*
 - *Commercial Property in Sherburne County and/or Minnesota*
 - *Commercial Property for Sale in Elk River*
 - *Commercial Property for Sale in Elk River, MN.*
 - *Commercial Property for Lease in Elk River*
 - *Commercial Property for Lease in Elk River, MN.*
 - *Commercial Property for Sale in Sherburne County and/or Minnesota*
 - *Commercial Property for Lease in Sherburne County and/or Minnesota*
 - *Sherburne County and/or Minnesota Real Estate*
 - *Sherburne County and/or Minnesota Commercial Real Estate*
 - *Sherburne County and/or Minnesota Commercial Property (ies)*
 - *Sherburne County and/or Minnesota business property*
 - *Elk River (and Sherburne County and/or Minnesota) Commercial Real Estate for Sale*
 - *Elk River (and Sherburne County and/or Minnesota) Commercial Real Estate Listings*
 - *Elk River (and Sherburne County and/or Minnesota) Commercial Property Leasing*
 - *Redevelopment in Elk River; Sherburne County and/or Minnesota; Minnesota*
 - *Elk River; Sherburne County and/or Minnesota redevelopment*
 - *Broader search.* Conduct a broader search to net new keywords to consider that will help you spark interest in a wider geographic area or help you align yourself with site selector search terms include:

- *Minnesota* – followed by commercial real estate, property, properties, for sale, listings and leasing
- *Twin Cities* – followed by commercial real estate, property, properties, for sale, listings and leasing
- *Minneapolis/St. Paul* - followed by commercial real estate, property, properties, for sale, listings and leasing
- *Minneapolis* – followed by commercial real estate, property, properties, for sale, listings and leasing
- *St. Paul* - followed by commercial real estate, property, properties, for sale, listings and leasing
- *Commercial Real Estate* – followed by name of city/county/region
- *Commercial Real Estate* – followed by property, properties, companies, industries, realtor, agents, development, redevelopment agency (ies)
- *Business property* – followed by for sale, listings, leasing

10. Powering Up Economic Development

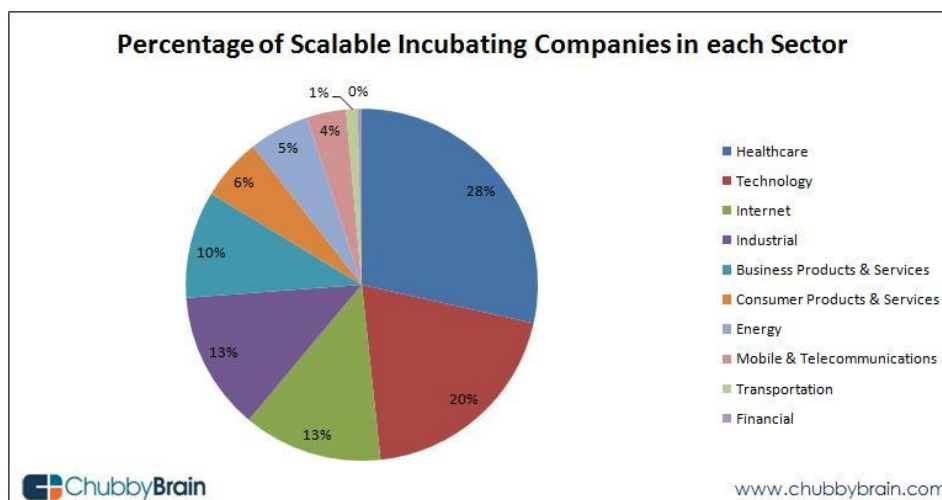
As we know, the Elk River brand is a powerful platform for building reputation, positioning and marketing. It can also perform as a powerful incentive to think about “economic gardening” - bringing fresh perspective and new concepts to the business of building Elk River’s economic base.

- **Incubators.**

EDOs across the country and in small, medium and large cities are turning to Incubators as a pro-active economic development activity. Elk River has the experience, expertise, facilities and mentoring resources to seriously consider initiating an Incubator project that would build the strength and reputation of its primary industry cluster.

- *EDA or EDA/Private Sector Partnership Opportunity.* Incubators are business assistance programs that provide entrepreneurs with an inexpensive start-up environment and a range of administrative, consulting, and networking services. These programs are often managed by economic development agencies and local governments as well as for-profit businesses (venture capitalists), or colleges and universities. They are “homes” for new businesses. They offer low-cost space, shared equipment, and the opportunity to learn from and collaborate with others in their field and local business owners. An incubator can house as few as five new start-ups or as many as ten – staying an average of two to three years before graduating to commercial space.
- *Focus on Compatible Clusters.* According to the research, there is a big upside to incubating energy-related businesses and Elk River has all the right resources. These cost-effective, cooperative environments can be leveraged not just to grow new businesses but to nurture specific emerging industries. Focus resources on compatible sectors, targeted-

industry
incubators to
help build
your
reputation.



- Research on the topic of incubators supports the fact that after only five years, businesses that were nurtured in a business incubator have a survival rate of 87 percent. Most important, 84 percent of companies that graduate from an incubator stay in the communities where they were incubated. This is significant because it affirms the city's investment to generate jobs and business taxes.

- ***Be Creative Risk-takers.***

Another one of the eight (8) practices of highly successful EDOs, Elk River can benefit from establishing a more aggressive, risk-taking economic development initiative. While Elk River has packaged some very attractive incentives, every city you compete with advertises and is prepared to offer and negotiate incentives for relocating or expanding businesses. These incentives range from direct cash investments, tax increment financing (TIFs), sales, business and use tax subordination, low cost or no cost loans, credits, abatements, exemptions, performance-based refunds and incentivizing performance to a community's quality of life issues. <http://www.gfoa.org/downloads/EDINCENTIVES.pdf>

- *Pick your ground for incentives.* Focus on what Elk River does best. And the brand helps you define that ground – it is all about compatibility with lifestyle, the environment, energy, conservation and innovation. Reward these characteristics more deliberately - and louder. It is NOT necessary for Elk River to compete with everyone on the same playing field or treat all prospective customers equally. Identify your priorities and incentivize those to improve your competitive positioning in that field.
 - Strengthen the "Compatibility" factors to stand out. Elk River has the right incentives and programs in place. Just build them up and power them up with richer benefits and more investment.
 - Reward Double DIP. Consider an incentive package for owners and developers prepared to bring two or more businesses into Elk River.
 - Build a Downtown Incentive Package. Rather than referring to incentives and opportunities available to everyone, feature a specific incentive package to re-energize Downtown. Compatible with the brand, consider this *Powering Up the Downtown*.

Sources: International Economic Development Council; Minnesota Economic Development Council, U.S. Department of Commerce; Minnesota Department of Commerce; INC Magazine; People Metrics; Whole Building Design Guide; Federal SIC Codes; CoStar; Business.com; Small Business Development Center; Economic Development Online; Area Development; ESRI; Investing in Innovation – PEW Center for the States; Money Morning; National League of Cities- Development for Small Cities; Urban Land Institute; Social Media Best Practices for Economic Development Organizations

VII. The Brand as a Catalyst for Public/Private Partnerships

While this Plan identifies hundreds of opportunities for the public and private sector to intersect and collaborate on projects and activities that advance the City's brand identity and support its core values, the launch of a compelling brand identity can be leveraged to reinvigorate some priority projects inherently important to the health, welfare and economic stability and growth of Elk River.

Strategy: *To leverage the strength of the City brand as a platform to create, develop, strengthen or renew public/private partnerships that benefit the City's Vision and goals and reinforce the brand promise.*

Tactics

1. Re-energize Downtown Facades.

While the City made great strides toward revitalizing the Downtown core, a lack of consensus and commitment among current businesses and property owners and a tough economy have challenged the momentum. The City, EDA, River's Edge Business Association and private partners are encouraged to re-energize their efforts with fresh perspective and the power of a brand.

- ***Downtown Energized by Nature Coalition.***

Bring the owners, investors and managers together. Get them engaged in crafting façade improvement design guidelines. With this participation and ownership, the improvements everyone yearns for will more likely be achieved.

- *Use the brand identity, brand promise and tagline as inspiration.* This is not a free-for-all and we cannot go back to being something Elk River is not anymore. Owners and business operators must be provided direction and the brand and brand narrative offers that direction and inspiration.
- *Engage architectural or graphic art college interns.* These students are looking to create portfolios for class assignments or interview presentations. Task them with integrating Elk River's history with today's Downtown with the brand aspiration to create a catalog and portfolio of design sketches for existing building facades. This will illustrate what the improvements would actually look like upon completion.
 - Use this catalog of renderings to inspire and encourage reluctant owners or those lacking the interest or imagination to pursue it.

- Improve your chances of persuading owners with an illustrated Design Guide that explains the specifications and changes you are trying to make to improve the imagery and perception. Framing what you are trying to achieve with visual imagery has been proven to help owners understand and visualize the benefits that will accrue to their business as well as for the community at large. Winnetka Design Guides are a good example. example <http://www.villageofwinnetka.org/pdf/documents/Design%20Guidelines-Complete.pdf>
- **Create a Design Competition.** Stimulate a design competition among Elk River business owners. Set a specific timeframe in which the work will be completed for judging. Select impartial judges to jury the competition. First Place Winner: \$2,500 toward the cost of the façade improvement; Second Place winner \$1,500 and Third Place winner \$750.
- **Incentivize the Façade Improvements.** Create a specific Façade Improvement Incentive package that offers matching funds up to \$5,000 for approved improvements or offer access to 2% or no-cost loans to accelerate façade improvements.
<http://www.stantonbusinessalliance.com/Portals/2/Files/EIPRebate.pdf>

2. Power Up Start-Ups.

INC Magazine “Best New Business Start-Up Opportunities” identified several businesses that are most naturally aligned with Elk River’s infrastructure, buildings, facilities and vision for the future. This cluster of industries reflects Elk River’s deep alignment with existing industries in the City focused on energy, lifestyle, recycling, re-use and all the innovative practices inherent in these businesses.

Environmental Consulting
Water Supply/Irrigation Systems
Safety and Quality Testing
Home Health Care
Tea & Health Beverages
Bakeries & Baked Goods

- ***Sponsor a Business Start-Up Competition.***

Don’t wait for the economy to get better – make it better for Elk River now. One of the more inspired and pro-active business start-up programs is underway in Amory, Mississippi. Literally a competition that challenges local entrepreneurs to make their dreams – and the City’s Main Street dreams – come true faster.

Powered by Nature is the perfect theme for integrating the brand into a business start-up program that improves occupancy in the Downtown core and encourages an extension of the area’s claim to energy-related businesses

<http://www.amorymainstreetinc.com/>

<http://amoryventure.org/index.htm>

- *Powered by Purpose.* Consider crafting a program to attract prospective owners. Rather than wait for things to happen, make them happen. Decide what new industries and businesses you want in Elk River and consider staking them to a first year of rent, basic start-up cost-sharing, utilities discount and a tax rebate in exchange for a share of royalties from revenues generated, that over the course of the offer, compensates the City for the original investment.
- *Identify funding sources for a public/private collaboration.* Elk River has compiled a good set of resources to help businesses identify funding and technical assistance. Take this a step further and make Elk River the lead organization in matching up start-ups with funding opportunities. Explore regional Venture and Angel Capital funding sources to spark interest and private investment. <http://www.collaborative.net/index.cfm>
- *Create the internal pathway.* Develop policies and protocols to support these types of programs including Resolutions to support the program and the organizational tools necessary to manage the program including:
 - An online application form which describes the person and the proposed business for screening.

- A vetting process for those applications and proposals that survive vetting.
 - A Small Business Start-Up Council composed of public and private sector representatives who will review and evaluate the applications.
 - A team of no more than three (3) members who will interview the applicant and make recommendations to the City.
 - An inventory of program features and benefits.
 - A legal process for transferring funds.
 - A menu of what the City will and will not do to assist the applicant in the actual start-up.
 - Reporting procedures and requirements.
- *Market the program.* Work the local and regional media and social media to announce a program that reaches out specifically to home-based businesses, garage start-ups, people with a great invention and big plans. Alert them to the opportunities available in Elk River and encourage them to go online, complete the application and submit a proposal.

- ***Incubator or Tech Shop?***

Elk River
explore a
in

- Tech
sales
intensive
partnering



may want to
new concept
research and
development
Shop - a
capital
foray into
and business

start-ups. Tech Shop is a new, member-based concept encouraging inventors, craftsmen, artists and others to use cooperative equipment and workshop environment. This business may give Elk River the opportunity to “experiment” affordably with the concept of an Incubator without the capital investment.

- *Partnership?* Elk River could benefit from being the first Minnesota Tech Shop location. Tech Shop offers residents and regional populations an attractive “magnet” destination and the added incentive is that its members and activities could potentially serve up innovations, inventions and start-up businesses that Elk River can assist in locating and building.
<http://techshop.ws/index.html>

3. Re-Purpose Vacant Downtown Storefronts

The Downtown vacancy rate is an opportunity to innovate! Consider permanent and temporary solutions that will re-energize the look and feel of the Downtown core and more likely stimulate investor and business interest.

- **Co-Work Spaces.**

Aaron Schapp started a web development company in Michigan and decided to “share” space with like-minded people looking for affordable work-share and collaboration experiences. Robert & Carol Orr opened The Bourse in New Haven, Connecticut. Downtown Vision, Inc in Jacksonville offers co-work space for artists, graphic designers, architects, freelancers and others. Elk River could distinguish itself and build a reputation for innovation and resourcefulness by carving out a niche in the energy, light industrial design area with a minimum capital investment. All these start-ups were financed, furnished, maintained and managed on a shoestring.

http://www.downtowndevelopment.com/downtown_research_and_development_center.php

- **Temporary Exhibits.**

Until permanent residents are identified and secured, employ this space to promote Elk River and your business and industry.

- *Make the storefront space a brand vehicle for Elk River.* Fill the windows with well-crafted but affordable full-size *Powered by Nature* exhibit that promotes the energy, determination, innovation and products that define Elk River as a place of commerce.
- *Make storefronts a marketing venue for Elk River companies.* Make a storefront available for local manufacturers to display their products and brag about innovative technique.

- **Display Venues for Art**

Until permanent residents are identified and secured, employ this space to promote Elk River arts.

- Arts Alliance as storefront curators. Engage the Arts Alliance in developing a set of rotating window displays featuring a whole range of visual art work created by local artists.
- Monthly window painting themes to express the brand themes or seasons.
- Window Performance Art could be an interesting way to draw residents, and ultimately visitors, into the Downtown core. Pantomimes, “silent film” movie vignettes and a variety of other artistic performance arts interpretations can be scheduled to coincide with sidewalk sales and activities at the River’s Edge Commons.

4. The River *IS* the Elk River Brand.

The river is part of the Elk River brand. It is implied and Elk River would benefit from delivering it in a bigger way. Because if the brand is all about the power of nature to inspire – it is also about the power of nature to generate business. The combination of waterfronts, natural beauty and serenity are powerful human attractors and Elk River's Downtown occupies an enviable stretch of the Mississippi River. This asset needs to be optimized for the Downtown to realize its full potential.

- ***Re-evaluate city ordinances.***

The ordinances and permitting processes that deter, deny or make water-facing extensions, patios and walk ways difficult or expensive should be reevaluated. The City's sensitivity to preservation of the waterfront can be maintained with thoughtfully developed development guidelines.

- ***Engage the water-facing business owners.***

Conversations about waterfront buildings, problems and issues will help the City evaluate the current situation, identify opportunities and craft solutions.

- ***Consider incentives.***

Encourage water-facing businesses to optimize the waterfront with renovation and expansion incentives that will help the City enhance the Downtown environment for current businesses and make it more attractive for future investment.

5. Gateway Clean-Up - One Stretch at a Time.

Many cities in America are struggling with unsightly entries to their communities. And many cities are tackling it one stretch of highway at a time. Because of its relative smaller size, and complemented by a determined city staff, Elk River may have the resources to tackle this challenge with a public/private sector alliance that understands the benefits of cleaning up the Highway 10 and Highway 169 approaches to Elk River.

- ***Inventory the properties lining the Highway entries into Elk River.***
Public properties can be tackled first while agreement is sought from private owners to collaborate in designated clean-up operations.
- ***Powered by Pride.***
This simple call-to-action asks residents, the Chamber, business owners, realtors and public employees to spend one Saturday a month re-claiming these properties to improve the first impression and environment leading into Elk River.
 - Supplement basic heavy equipment from the City or local contractors with clean-up supply donations from Elk River businesses or ask Home Depot or Lowe's to sponsor a specific stretch of highway in exchange for publicity and marketing.
 - Get permissions and commitments for participation from the property owners.

6. Multiply the “Friends” Model to Enhance Other Parks.

Elk River has the model for a public/private parks program at work already. DIRTWX is a great example of public/private collaboration to maintain and enhance vital natural assets. Duplicate this model to impact Woodlands, Babcock, Orono and other parks throughout the City.

- ***Energized by Friends.***

These community models are abundant throughout the country and prove invaluable for creating and sustaining valuable assets and environments. Marin County, CA. and Morris, N.J. are just two examples of multiple “Friends” programs that fuel parks programs in partnership.

<http://www.maringov.org/en/Depts/PK/Programs/Volunteer/Community%20Volunteer%20Days.aspx>

<http://www.morrisparks.net/volunteer.asp>

- ***Identify Legacy Opportunities.***

Want to add infrastructure, replace park benches, build new picnic tables, enhance or renovate water ramps?

- *Special Projects.* Offer these as partnering opportunities to organizations separate and apart from the “Friends” approach. These projects will last years and some organizations and individuals want a hand in something that lasts a lifetime.
- *Naming Rights.* These projects can attract individuals, families, business or organizations with naming rights – small plaques or integrated design elements that will encourage sponsorship and adoption.

7. Leverage Elk River Education and Industry Clusters.

The Elk River brand promise speaks to the quality of life and commerce. This compatibility will be enhanced with a long-term commitment to workforce development. Cultivating a skilled workforce from among the surrounding communities to sustain the companies that are compatible with Elk River ought to be an economic development *and* community goal.

- ***Encourage and lead a Seamless Education Initiative.***

The concept of a seamless education initiative is a simple equation: consult and collaborate with the area's industries and businesses to understand and inventory the education and skill sets required; compare with education curriculum and career coaching; and intersect the two to develop and sustain school- to-job tracks. The Long Beach Initiative has become a model for the United States. Although Elk River lacks the higher education component, there is still great value for Elk River and the private sector to collaborate on this work force development project.

Long Beach Initiative:

http://www.lbusd.k12.ca.us/main_offices/superintendent/public_information/newsroom/articleDetails_NEW.cfm?articleID=1191

- *Reach out to the industry leaders and education leaders.* Broach the concept with them and generate enthusiasm for an inaugural meeting.
- *Convene the leaders in education and industry.* The City can play a key role in facilitating this initiative. Ask the leadership to meet and discuss the opportunities and benefits for developing a K-12 workforce development program.
- *Seek support from private sector.* Mentors, on-site classes, plant tours, workshops, internships, exhibits, career days and other projects will help seed the initiative in the communities.

VIII. Resources

Elk River Implementation Plan Guideline

Key:

High – High Priority Brand tactics *required* to organize, seed, launch and sustain the Brand to build and promote Elk River reputation.

Timeframe: Immediate – 6 months.

Medium – Medium Priority Brand tactics *recommended as necessary* to support, reinforce and extend Brand traction to build and promote Elk River reputation.

Timeframe: 6 months – 12 months.

Low – Low Priority Brand tactics *recommended as important for their potential high impact* but may require additional time, resources, policy, partners and/or funding.

Timeframe: 1 – 3 years.

BRAND NAVIGATOR

Priority

I. Building the Brand Organization

1. Take Ownership	High
2. Lay a Strong Foundation.	High
3. Build the Brand Navigation Messaging Package	High
4. The Brand Navigators as Chief Brand Marketers	High
5. Take the Lead on High Impact Brand Projects	Medium
6. Identify Brand Funding & Resources	High
7. Sustain the Brand Culture & Momentum	Medium

II. Prepare to Tell the Elk River Story

1. Get Elk River Insiders Aboard First	High
2. Conduct a Communications Audit	High
3. Elk River Branded Merchandise Spreads the Word	Medium
4. Community Brand Launch	Low
5. Make the Brand Real for Elk River Residents	Medium

III. The Brand as Marketing Platform

1. The Marketing Mix	High
2. Put Communication Touchpoints to Work	High
3. The Website as #1 Marketing Tool	High
4. Employ Brand Messaging to Build Reputation	High
5. Deploy Social Media	High
6. Energize Public Relations	High

IV. The Brand as Community-Building Platform

1. Leverage Community Strength	Medium
2. Leverage Community Organizations	High
3. Leverage Existing Community Events	High

V. The Brand as a City Platform	
1. Align Branding Goals with City's Vision and Goals	High
2. Harness the Power of Communication	High
3. Everybody Sells Elk River!	High
4. Energize <i>Currents</i>.	High
5. Assemble a Powerful Database	High
6. Practice Customer Relationship Management	High
7. Imbed the Brand	Medium
8. Brand the City Publications	High
9. Pump Up the City Website	High
10. Speak with One Social Media Voice	High
VI. The Brand as EDA Platform	
1. Align the Brand with the EDA Goals	High
2. Cultivate Champions for Elk River and the Brand	High
3. Launch a Powerful EDA Website Brand for Elk River	High
4. Build Up Inventory & Project Pages	High
5. Target Economic Development Messaging	High
6. Consolidate and Strengthen your "Natural Resources"	Medium
7. Get Closer to the Realtors	High
8. Build Targeted Industry and Trade Media Databases	High
9. Launch an Online Presence	Medium
10. Powering Up Economic Development	Low
VII. The Brand as a Catalyst for Public/Private Partnerships	
1. Re-energize Downtown Facades	Medium
2. Power Up Start-Ups	Low
3. Re-Purpose Vacant Downtown Storefronts	Medium
4. The River <i>IS</i> the Elk River Brand	Low
5. Gateway Clean-Up - One Stretch at a Time	Medium
6. Multiply the "Friends" Model to Enhance Other Parks	Low
7. Leverage Elk River Education and Industry Clusters	Low

Chief Brand Navigator Position Description

Summary Description

The Chief Brand Navigator (Brand Manager) is responsible for the health and well-being of the Elk River brand and for managing the communications functions for the brand. He/she is charged with making the best use of the community's resources in the name of the Brand and serves as the primary point of contact for all team building and fundraising associated with the Brand and the Elk River. He/she works closely with his/her peers in the public and private sector to both promote and promulgate the Elk River/brand vision through a variety of activities including communications, advertising, product development, infrastructure refinements, signage, events and more. In addition to the above functions, he/she handles media relations for the Brand Navigators and the Elk River brand. A passion for and knowledge of the community, political savvy, communications know-how and a strong understanding of the benefits and power of the Brand are a must.

Responsibilities:

Oversee the integrity, launch, growth and development of the Elk River brand.

Develop and lead a private/public sector team charged with Brand implementation and promotion.

Make best and highest use of community resources on behalf of the Brand and Elk River.

Plan, direct and implement public information/education, media and marketing programs for Elk River and the brand affiliates and partners.

Duties:

Fundraise on behalf of the Brand and related activities

Build grassroots support for the Brand and its use

Develop and implement the Brand Navigator strategies and tactics for brand implementation and promotion.

Design presentation materials for educating about the Brand

Create internal and external communications for the Brand

Target, cultivate and integrate the Brand with specific community goals

Develop branded activities and events

Monitor and evaluate the Brand's performance and provide regular updates to the Brand Navigators.

Achieve pre-determined Brand marketing objectives

Create and implement a media plan for Elk River and affiliated Brands

Coordinate public and private sector communications plans to achieve traction for the Brand.

Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

Excellent time management and organizational skills

Strong team-building abilities

Strong networking and political navigation skills

Ability to work effectively with a wide variety of people
Ability to motivate others to get results
Ability to lead others
Experience with PC, PowerPoint and Microsoft suite of products
Ability to effectively communicate with all levels of the organization as well as with all divisions/groups within the organization
Effective interpersonal and active listening skills
Excellent writing and social media skills
Strong presentation skills
Ability to work with the media to achieve a desired end result
Ability to create a comprehensive public information/communications plan and measure results of that plan

Minimum Qualifications (to be determined by the Brand Navigators)

Salary Range (to be determined by the Brand Navigators)

One Page Social Media Plan

Define Your Voice

What's your brand personality? Don't forget, you are what you talk about?

Channels

Pick the social spaces where your audiences are most likely to be hanging out.

Locate Your Birds

Who should you be running around with? Find them and connect-follow-Like.

Strategies

How will you reach out to your audiences to create social media engagement?

Timing

What days will you be active? What times? How often? Total weekly hours?

Measurement

Identify metrics used to measure success.